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LABOUR TRIED TO GAG BLACK BARRISTER WHO WROTE ITS RACE REPORT

Constance Marten and Mark Gordon jury dismissed as they fail to reach a verdict in baby manslaughter trial

Tourists grapple with protesters who vandalised Stonehenge with powder paint

Activists are tackled as they spray the ancient stones yesterday as thousands are expected to mark the solstice

Major poll shock: Sunak to lose seat in Tory bloodbath

New polls predict leader will be first sitting PM to lose own seat in election, with Tories slumping to between 108 and 53 seats – their lowest since party's formation in 1834 – leaving Labour on course for its biggest ever majority

KATE DEVLIN
WHITEHALL EDITOR

The Tories are facing a historic defeat at the general election according to a survey that suggests the Conservative Party could be left with just 53 MPs. The losses could include Rishi Sunak's seat in Richmond, North Yorkshire, making him the first sitting prime minister to lose their seat at a general election. The Tories could be left battling the Liberal Democrats for second place. The polling analysis by Savanta and Electoral Calculus puts the Labour Party on track to take 516 seats, giving it an estimated majority of 382 – twice the size of Tony Blair's landslide in 1997.

Editorials

The party of change still has work to do on race

Sir Keir Starmer, as he often reminds us, has spent the last four years changing the Labour Party and preparing it for

government. For that act of statesmanship, he should be thanked.

Every democracy needs a strong principal opposition party that can present itself as a plausible replacement government. This the UK now possesses, for the first time since Labour lost power in 2010. Vindicated by public opinion, Sir Keir has had remarkable success in his endeavours. There is one area, however, where the difficult legacy of the past continues to haunt him and his colleagues – race.

As *The Independent* reports today, the Labour Party under Sir Keir, for some inexplicable reason, took it upon itself to attack and attempt to gag the respected Black barrister Martin Forde KC. Mr Forde was commissioned by the party to report on its culture, factionalism and management during the antisemitism scandal, and to make recommendations in light of his findings.

He explored a "hierarchy of racism" and a "toxic" culture of factional disputes between the party's right and left. The vast majority of Mr Forde's 165 recommendations have been acted upon. The national executive committee of the Labour Party acknowledged: "The [Forde Report] is clear that the culture of factionalism led to a situation where allegations of racism and harassment weren't being addressed. Elected representatives, our members, and the public rightly expect better from a progressive left-wing party."

That was followed by a further, separate and damning investigation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which concluded that Labour was "responsible for unlawful acts of harassment and discrimination". Sir Keir oversaw the implementation of substantial internal reforms, and, eventually, expelled Jeremy Corbyn from the party. That was symbolic of a wider and deeper change within Labour.

We now learn, however, that far from being supported and thanked for his efforts, Mr Forde has been sent threatening letters by solicitors working on behalf of the Labour Party. It is crass beyond belief. His offence – which is not an offence in law

– was to speak openly and make "highly prejudicial comments about the Labour Party".

If that were actually a crime, then half of the country, at least, would be locked up by now. Mr Forde was informed, impertinently and menacingly, that "all options" were open. That might reasonably give rise to the fear that he would be reported to the relevant regulatory authority – which could harm his professional reputation and livelihood.

It is, in fact, the Labour Party that has been making "highly prejudicial" remarks about Mr Forde. Sir Keir, if he was aware of this letter to Mr Forde, should have known better, given his own high standing in the profession.

Rather than responding in the traditional manner, with denialism, Labour really should have treated what Mr Forde was warning about party candidate selection as a prompt to take further action. In the words of the prominent barrister: "A high proportion of Black and Asian councillors or prospective MPs felt they'd been subjected to disciplinary action which had been deliberately timed to exclude them from qualifying processes or selection."

Mr Forde rightly finds it objectionable – and it is indeed ironic – to have "people saying to me, 'You don't know how to behave as a professional.' I'm afraid that Black professionals get it all the time ... I am sure that people will definitely see it as a collateral attack on a Black professional."

The recent fiasco over the attempted deselection of Diane Abbott as a parliamentary candidate also constitutes powerful proof that the Labour Party still appears unable to manage the race issue in a consistently seemly and fair manner. It is a problem, not least, because the new House of Commons will have more members from ethnic minorities than ever before – most of them on the Labour benches – and they will expect, and have every right to, just treatment as their careers progress.

The Labour government, if elected, will also need to navigate a careful path with its policy around Israel-Palestine, because the war in Gaza has, in some places, become a handy weapon for

Islamophobes across the political spectrum who have never previously expressed much interest in the Middle East.

Labour's manifesto commitments in this area – to introduce a Race Equality Act and to reverse the Conservatives' decision to downgrade the monitoring of antisemitic and Islamophobic hate – are encouraging signs of public policy positions moving in the right direction, as will be the highly diverse new intake of Labour MPs. But this bullying treatment of Mr Forde suggests that the party still has work to do to get its own house in order.

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Poll predicts Sunak will lose seat with Tories down to 53

New survey supports warnings of Labour 'supermajority'

Rishi Sunak may be on course to become the first sitting prime minister to be unseated (PA)

KATE DEVLIN
WHITEHALL EDITOR

The Conservatives are facing a historic defeat at the election after a bombshell new poll suggested the party could be left with just 53 MPs – and Rishi Sunak would not be among them.

Adding further misery to a raft of dire poll results for Mr Sunak,

it also shows him on course to become the first sitting prime minister to lose his seat. And the Tories could be left battling the Lib Dems to avoid third place, with Sir Ed Davey's party set to gain 50 MPs.

The Savanta and Electoral Calculus polling analysis puts Labour on track to take 516 seats, with an estimated majority of 382 – twice the size of Tony Blair's 1997 landslide – suggesting that recent Tory warnings of a Labour "supermajority" are correct.

While Nigel Farage's party Reform UK was not predicted to win any seats, a separate megapoll by YouGov added to Mr Sunak's mounting woes, suggesting that the successor to the Brexit Party would return five MPs to Westminster. They include Mr Farage, who would finally become an MP at his eighth attempt. His party would also beat Tory chair Richard Holden, who has faced accusations that his candidacy in the "safe" seat of Basildon and Billericay was a "stitch-up".

The Tories are also on course to be wiped out in the North East, and to secure just three seats in the North West. An astonishing 14 ministers who attend cabinet are set to lose their seats, including Jeremy Hunt, Penny Mordaunt, Mel Stride, Alex Chalk and Mark Harper. Humiliatingly, the party would also lose constituencies formerly held by previous prime ministers including John Major, Theresa May, Ted Heath, Boris Johnson and David Cameron.

The poll results were published hours after a cabinet minister warned that the Tories will "get it in the neck" at the election. Welsh secretary David TC Davies said in an interview with *The Sun* that his party "can't hide" from polls that are "clearly pointing at a large Labour majority".

Chris Hopkins, political research director at Savanta, said the "stark" figures are a consequence of "the almost unique set of events conspiring against the Conservative Party this election". These include Mr Sunak's D-Day gaffe, when he left the commemorations early to record a TV interview, and the rise of Reform UK. But they also include some longer-term challenges, including the mini-Budget and Partygate, said Mr Hopkins.

He added: “We’ve been conditioned for so long to believe the Conservative Party, as the natural party of government, will always be a major political force. But our MRP [multilevel regression with post-stratification] projections – in partnership with Electoral Calculus – suggest that they will be fighting with the Liberal Democrats to be the official opposition, with Labour on for a historic majority.”

He said that his polling firm currently lists nearly 200 seats as being “too close to call, meaning just small changes could have a huge impact on the outcome of this election”.

Pollsters say Sunak’s decision to leave the D-Day event early has contributed to poor Tory ratings (POOL/AFP/Getty)

Polling expert Professor Sir John Curtice told *The Independent* that the party appeared to be on course for its biggest defeat in more than a century. He said: “Whether it’s going to be 53, or 108, or whatever, it is all pointing to a low figure. And if the Labour lead remains anything like it is, and Reform remain as high as they are, the Tories getting to the 156 [seats] of 1906 [an election that saw the Conservative Party defeated heavily in a Liberal landslide] is beginning to look more and more remote.”

YouGov said its tally “has the Conservatives on their lowest seat tally in the party’s almost 200-year history”, predicting that Labour is on course to achieve a 200-seat majority. Its analysis suggests that Labour is likely to take 425 seats, with the Tories taking 108, the Liberal Democrats 67, SNP 20, Reform UK five, Plaid Cymru four, and the Green Party two.

Earlier, another megapoll, carried out for More in Common UK, found the Conservatives on course for their worst defeat in more than a century, with high-profile names including Jeremy Hunt set to lose their seats. Luke Tryl, executive director of More in Common UK, which carried out the research, said the findings showed that the Tories were in a “deep hole” and that the problem was getting worse. The poll, of more than 10,000 people, suggests the Conservatives would hold on to just 155 seats, their worst total since 1906.

The polls all used a technique known as multilevel regression with post-stratification, to model results at a constituency level.

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Labour tried to gag barrister who wrote its racism report

Martin Forde says people will see letter from party as a 'collateral attack on a Black professional' (Getty/Al Jazeera)

NADINE WHITE
RACE CORRESPONDENT

Labour attempted to gag a prominent Black barrister who authored a report that exposed a "hierarchy of racism" within the party, *The Independent* can reveal. In a letter sent by lawyers representing Labour, Martin Forde KC was warned that he was

“acting against the party’s interest” after he gave an interview highlighting Labour’s failures over the report.

Mr Forde said the exchange had left him “irritated”, telling *The Independent* that the party “can’t silence me”.

The Forde report, an independent inquiry into Labour’s culture that was published in July 2022, found that the party was an “unwelcoming place for people of colour” and had a “toxic” culture of factional disputes between the party’s right and left.

In March 2023, Mr Forde gave an interview to Al Jazeera in which he said that no one from Labour had been willing to discuss the recommendations further and highlighted concerns raised by ethnic minority politicians within Labour about racism in the party. In response, it has now emerged that the Labour Party sent Mr Forde a robust legal letter, seen by *The Independent*, accusing him of acting against the party’s interests and advising him that it was “considering all of its options”.

Lawyers accused Mr Forde of having made “extensive negative and highly prejudicial comments” and questioned his professional conduct.

Speaking to *The Independent* this week, the respected barrister said: “I don’t know if it was an attempt to silence me. I mean, they’ve couched it carefully along the lines of ‘We’re reminding you of your professional duties,’ which I found mildly irritating because I am a regulatory lawyer, and I don’t like my professionalism or ethics being questioned … but I felt it was more.

He continued: “I’m a private individual; they can’t silence me. I fundamentally object to people saying to me, ‘You don’t know how to behave as a professional.’ I’m afraid that Black professionals get it all the time.”

Forde says Labour’s lack of debate over the report’s findings raised wider concerns (Al Jazeera)

The Forde report made 165 recommendations, including the use of blind CVs in recruitment and changes to the complaints procedure, the majority of which the party says it has now implemented. However, during his interview with Al Jazeera, the barrister claimed that Labour’s lack of debate and engagement over his findings at the time raised wider concerns. He described Labour’s antisemitism training as “largely didactic, top-down and one-dimensional”.

The barrister also told the news outlet that “quite a high proportion of Black and Asian councillors or prospective MPs felt they’d been subjected to disciplinary action which had been deliberately timed to exclude them from qualifying processes or selection”.

On receipt of the legal complaint, Mr Forde responded via his own lawyers, in a letter, seen by *The Independent*, that dismissed the accusations as “baseless”. He said he did not hear from Labour on the matter again.

Mr Forde said he read the correspondence from Labour’s legal representatives as an indication that they might report him to his regulatory body. He said: “I was surprised to receive those letters, and was also surprised by the tone and content, because I thought I had a sufficiently good working relationship with the general secretary for him simply to ask me what I’d said,” adding: “All he had to do was pick up the phone.”

The Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, has been accused in recent weeks of enacting a purge on the Labour left, following selection rows over veteran MP Diane Abbott and Chingford and Woodford Green candidate Faiza Shaheen.

Ms Shaheen was dropped as a candidate over a series of likes on social media posts, while it was briefed that Ms Abbott, who had recently had the Labour whip restored after she suggested that people from the Jewish, Irish and Traveller communities experience prejudice but not racism, would be barred from standing for the party. It has now been confirmed that she is allowed to stand as a Labour candidate.

There have been rows over the candidacies of Faiza Shaheen and Diane Abbott in recent weeks (PA/Getty)

When asked what people might make of the correspondence from Labour in the context of the arguments over Ms Abbott and Ms Shaheen, Mr Forde added: "I am sure that people will definitely see it as a collateral attack on a Black professional."

Mish Rahman, a member of Labour's national executive committee (NEC), told *The Independent* he was disappointed by the letter to Mr Forde.

"This legal threat from the Labour Party to Mr Forde is consistent with the behaviour of Starmer's Labour Party, which is intent on cracking down on any dissent or criticism rather than the actual perpetrators of racism," said Mr Rahman. "We also saw this in the party's pursuit of those it believed had leaked

evidence of racism, and its defence of those who had made racist and bigoted comments."

Mr Rahman claimed that Mr Forde had been invited to attend NEC meetings on several occasions, but that Sir Keir and his general secretary had refused to allow it.

He said: "As a member, I received countless correspondence from members about the delayed Forde report into racism in the party. It is now clear as day that Forde was suppressed by Labour's leadership, and that they have attempted to cover up the report's disgraceful findings by stopping Forde from meeting the NEC.

"Under Keir's leadership, the party operates a hierarchy of racism, where it doesn't take anti-Black racism and Islamophobia seriously, and instead punishes those like Martin Forde KC and Faiza Shaheen, who bring evidence of racism to light. The irony and double standards are astoundingly laid bare."

A Labour Party spokesperson said: "The Labour Party is fully committed to tackling racist and discriminatory attitudes wherever they arise, within and outside the party. Labour has apologised for the culture and attitudes expressed by senior staff that were examined by the Forde report. We are proud the party has completed work on the recommendations made by Martin Forde, and want to place on record, once again, our thanks to Martin for his hard work.

"Labour has introduced a new, independent complaints process, a code of conduct on Afrophobia, anti-Black racism and Islamophobia, and mandatory training for staff on Afrophobia and anti-Black racism. We are delighted that Labour has more Black candidates, and Black male candidates in particular, than ever before."

The Independent also contacted Sir Keir's office for comment.

The leaked documents referred to in this report were made available by Paul Holden, an investigative journalist whose book will be published at the end of the year

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Election news in brief

An edited image depicting Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping cheering on Keir Starmer has been shared to the Conservative Party's official Twitter/X account (Conservatives)

Tories shamed for suggesting dictators will welcome Labour

A Tory advert suggesting dictators are looking forward to a Labour government has been branded "shameful and demeaning" by the former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. Crossbench peer Alex Carlile said the Conservatives "should be ashamed of themselves" for publishing a photoshopped image of Sir Keir Starmer being cheered on by North Korean despot Kim Jong-un.

The party's official Twitter/X account shared the image, in which the North Korean leader is flanked by Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping. All three dictators are cheering on the Labour leader, with the image apparently suggesting the trio hope Sir Keir wins the 4 July general election, an outcome that opinion polls suggest is highly likely.

Lord Carlile told *The Independent*: "It's shameful and demeaning nonsense. The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves for stooping to those depths. It demeans the reputation of politics." Former Tory minister Alistair Burt said the post was "disgraceful".

And Labour's candidate for Windsor said the advert was "truly pathetic". Pavitar Kaur Mann added: "I'd much rather the defence of our country being in the hands of someone who has public service built into his core than a party that has decimated our armed services and takes money from Russian oligarchs."

PM's police officer arrested over alleged election date bets

A police officer in Rishi Sunak's close protection team has been arrested and suspended over alleged bets about the timing of the general election. The police constable from the Met's Royalty and Specialist Protection command was arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of misconduct in public office after the betting watchdog contacted the force last Friday. The officer was taken into custody and bailed pending further enquiries, with the case being referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, according to the Met.

A Scotland Yard spokesperson told *The Independent*: "We can confirm that on Friday 14 June, the Met were contacted by the Gambling Commission who informed us that they were investigating alleged bets made by a police constable from the Met's Royalty and Specialist Protection command, which were related to the timing of the general election.

"The matter was immediately referred to officers in the Met's Directorate of Professional Standards, who opened an

investigation, and the officer was also removed from operational duties. The officer was subsequently arrested on Monday 17 June on suspicion of misconduct in public office. He was taken into custody and bailed pending further enquiries. The matter has also been referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. The Gambling Commission continues to lead the investigation into the alleged betting offences, and our investigation is running in parallel to that."

Labour suspends candidate over pro-Russia social media post

The Labour Party has suspended a candidate following reports that he shared "pro-Russian" material online. Andy Brown, who is standing in Aberdeen North and Moray East, reportedly shared an article from Russian state media outlet RT following the Salisbury poisonings, which claimed the novichok nerve agent used in the attack was "never produced in Russia".

The article, shared by Mr Brown in April 2018, also claimed that the toxin "was in service in the US, UK, and other Nato states". Dawn Sturgess, 44, died after being exposed to the nerve agent novichok, which had been left in a discarded perfume bottle in Amesbury, Wiltshire, in July 2018. It followed the attempted murders of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, his daughter Yulia, and former police officer Nick Bailey, who were poisoned near Salisbury in March that year. All three survived, as did Ms Sturgess's boyfriend, Charlie Rowley.

According to *The Press and Journal*, in the same month, Mr Brown also shared a quote from a Jewish historian, which said: "The real issue ... is that right-wing Jews in the Labour Party and outside the party object to the fact that Jeremy Corbyn is a consistent supporter of Palestinian rights."

SNP manifesto ignores 'big fiscal challenges', says think tank

The SNP's manifesto ignores the "big fiscal challenges" an independent Scotland would immediately face, a think tank has said. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has released its initial

reaction to the SNP manifesto following the party's launch event yesterday.

First minister John Swinney and the SNP have previously quoted from IFS analysis, in particular its assessment of the implied spending reductions in unprotected departments contained in the Tory and Labour plans. The SNP has called for more spending by the UK government, saying the NHS should receive a £10bn top-up which would result in an extra £1.6bn for the Scottish government. The party's manifesto also demands the full devolution of tax powers to Scotland, and the extension of the windfall tax to companies making excess profits "rather than the raid on the northeast of Scotland proposed by Labour and the Tories".

IFS associate director David Phillips said: "The SNP manifesto calls for UK-wide spending plans to be topped up. This is to avoid the need to cut spending on unprotected areas, and to increase spending on, in particular, the NHS, working-age benefits, overseas aid and green investment. They argue that the cost of this could be met by UK-wide tax rises, additional economic growth from the UK rejoining the EU in the coming Parliament, and additional borrowing.

"However, in its call for Scottish independence, the SNP ignores the potential hit to economic growth from leaving the UK, and the big fiscal challenges an independent Scotland would immediately have to confront." *PA*

Fewer voter registrations in run-up to election than in 2019

Nearly 3 million people have applied to register to vote since the general election was called on 22 May – down by a quarter compared with the same period before the 2019 general election. In 2019, the general election was called on 29 October and the deadline to register was 26 November. In that period, 3.85 million people applied to register, compared with 2.90m this time.

More than 630,000 people applied to register to vote on Tuesday, as the midnight deadline approached. This is the second-highest number on record, broken only on 26 November 2019, when 660,000 people registered in one day. The latest figure of people on the parliamentary electoral register in the UK is 46,652,520, but it has not been updated since December 2023.

There has been much discussion over young voters not being democratically involved – with an exclusive *Independent* poll showing that a third of young people do not plan to vote. In fact, registration application among the youngest group of voters (18-25) stands at just half of the equivalent period in 2019 – with just 746,000 Generation Z voters registering to vote since the election was called this year, compared with 1.4 million in the lead-up to the 2019 general election.

Reeves vows to tackle gender pay gap

Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has insisted she wants to close the gender pay gap "once and for all", although she said Labour's plans are "not about naming and shaming". Ms Reeves said: "In the position of chancellor, I believe the biggest impact that I can make to the lives of ordinary women, women who go out to work, is to close the gender pay gap once and for all. That's what I'm setting out to do."

Labour's manifesto states the party will "take action to reduce the gender pay gap", with the newspaper reporting this would not involve legally enforcing businesses to take action but instead obliging them to implement an action plan.

Ms Reeves told *The Guardian*: "This is not about naming and shaming. It's just saying we recognise there are some sectors, some firms, where historically there have been a lot more men than women, but everybody can do something to close that gender pay gap."

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A Jag and a Greggs: on the votes trail with Rees-Mogg

Despite current dire polling, **Alex Ross** encounters the Tory Brexiteer in jovial mood as he canvasses for local support

Blue is the colour: Jacob Rees-Mogg takes a break for lunch at the North East Somerset and Hanham Conservative Association office in Keynsham (Pictures by The Independent)

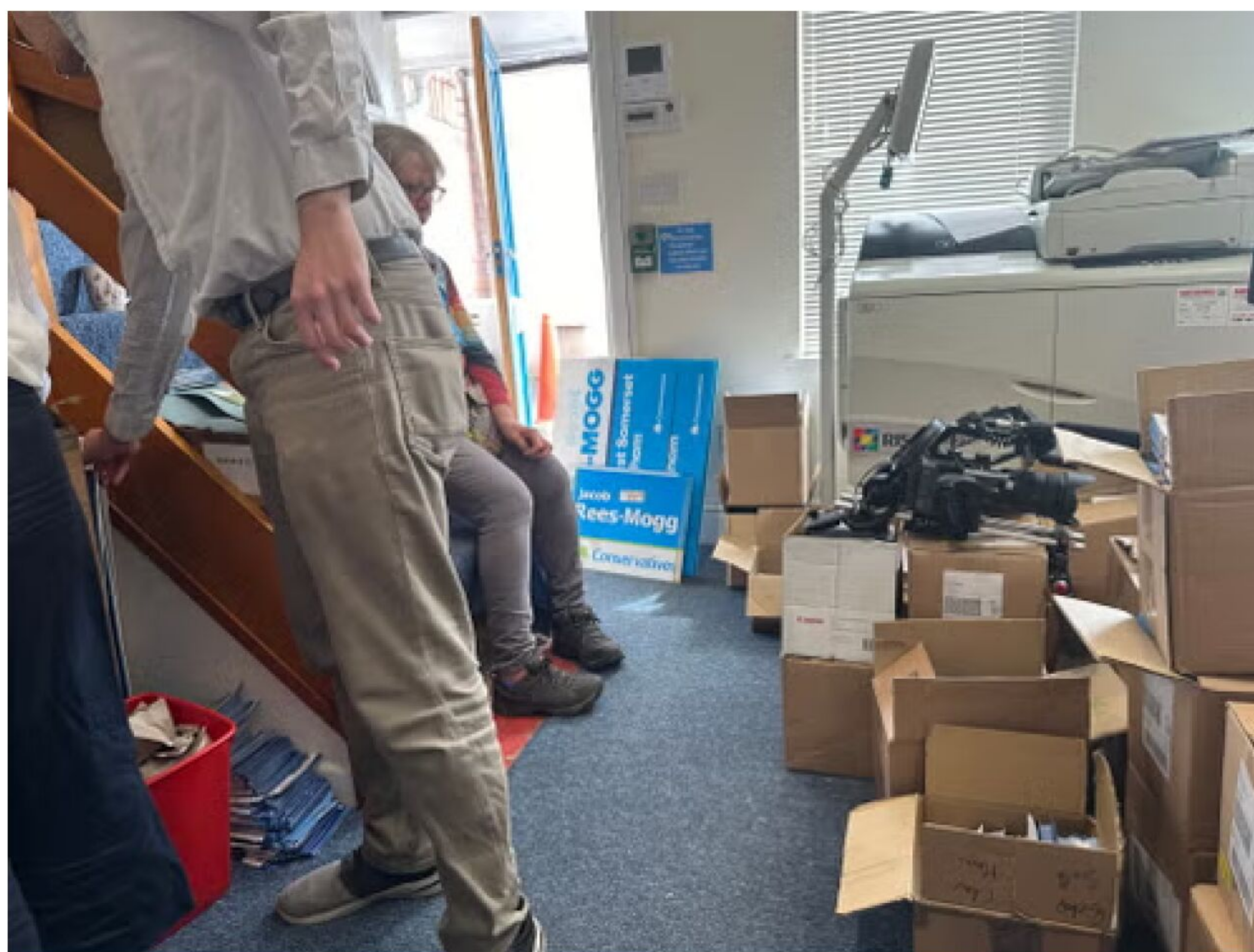
On display inside Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg's untidy office are three large portraits: Sir Winston Churchill, Boris Johnson and himself.

They hang from cream-coloured wallpaper behind a cluttered wooden desk at the centre of the HQ for Sir Jacob's uphill

campaign to win the North East Somerset and Hanham constituency – his fifth straight term in the area. "Boris went up when he became leader... we always had the leader up," says Sir Jacob, looking up at the pictures. "Then Covid came and we've hardly used the office since."

No Liz Truss, then. But what about Rishi Sunak, will he get his place next to Churchill? 'Um... well, we will eventually," Sir Jacob says, with a wry smile. "We'll see how much we need it after the election, when he's returned comfortably as PM. Yes, absolutely."

It's 17 days to polling day on 4 July and I'm in Keynsham, on the edge of Bristol, following Sir Jacob's general election campaign. Hidden down an alleyway between Bargain Booze and a local solicitor's firm, it's a struggle at first to find the office (I initially mistake it for the former Keynsham and District Conservative Club, where early-morning drinkers are sipping their first pint) but I get there eventually.

Boxes of delivery leaflets cover most of the carpeted floor while the chairs and the steep stairwell are filled with around eight friendly members sipping coffee and chatting before the day's canvassing.

The campaign HQ is a hive of activity ahead of canvassing

"The national polls... you know, we don't read those," says Margaret Brewer, Sir Jacob's upbeat agent, with the latest poll

from Ipsos projecting the worst post-war result for the Tory party.

Suddenly, Sir Jacob appears at the doorway wearing a dark grey double-breasted suit with a large blue rosette. We shake hands before he picks an issue up with his agent. The local BBC channel is planning an election debate, and he's concerned the Green Party candidate has not been invited. "It doesn't seem fair," he says, showing genuine concern, before heading outside to discuss the plan for the day in private.

Sir Jacob was elected MP for North East Somerset 14 years ago. It's a constituency he's comically described as circling the city of Bath – where Lib Dem Wera Hobhouse was previously MP – like dough around the jam in a doughnut.

But his political rite of passage came in 1997 when he was parachuted into a virtually unwinnable seat for the Tory party in Central Fife. A quick search online reveals pictures of the smartly dressed 27-year-old knocking on working-class doors.

"There was no Bentley, sadly," Sir Jacob laughs, correcting subsequent media coverage as he fondly recalls the campaign. "I'd knock on people's doors and say, 'I'm Jacob Rees-Mogg, I'm the Conservative candidate, can I count on you for your support?'

Rees-Mogg beside a map showing the redrawn North East Somerset and Hanham constituency

"More often than not, people would laugh ... they did think it was very funny that a Tory was asking for their vote."

Fast forward 27 years, and electoral campaigning for Sir Jacob remains "very similar" – although in Longwell Green, where we are heading for canvassing today, the reception is likely to be different. The pretty urban suburb on the edge of east Bristol has a strong Conservative following – five out of the six local councillors are Tories – which Sir Jacob wants to cement ahead of the general election. And unlike on the Central Fife campaign, there's no family nanny, Veronica Crook, in tow while knocking on doors – although his mother, Lady Gillian Rees-Mogg, does show up in the afternoon to help in the office.

It takes eight minutes to drive from Keynsham to Longwell Green, where it doesn't take long to spot the lanky figure of Sir Jacob talking to a woman in a cul-de-sac, or his smart Jaguar XJL parked nearby. This is a leafy area with a modern housing estate of large semi-detached homes, many with pristine front gardens. With the sun out, many residents are busy mowing lawns and cutting hedges. The area, like the neighbouring wards of Bitton and Hanham, will join the old North Somerset constituency as part of boundary changes at the election.

'More often than not, people would laugh,' says Rees-Mogg of his first election campaign in Central Fife (Getty)

But polling isn't looking good for Sir Jacob.

Labour's Dan Norris, mayor of the West of England and former MP for the seat, is projected to win comfortably, with 42 per cent of the vote according to Survation's MRP, followed by Sir Jacob on 27 per cent, Lib Dems on 14 per cent and Reform UK with 12 per cent.

Mr Norris's election leaflet features a "Stop Rees-Mogg" stamp. "Absolutely delighted that he's advertising me," says Sir Jacob.

Sir Jacob accepts the national polls are "not encouraging reading for the Conservatives", but he urges caution at "an extrapolation of a national poll into a constituency poll" for the local projections. And on the doorstep in Longwell Green, the early signs are promising.

After finishing talking to the woman on her front lawn, Sir Jacob goes to two addresses where people tell the former business secretary he has their vote. At the second address, a resident who is taking a break from fixing his dishwasher shares his main issues: "Immigration and the taxes if Labour get in."

But around the corner, problems arise for Sir Jacob and his team. First, a mother holding her three-month-old baby abruptly says she won't be voting for Sir Jacob, then, at the next door, a man says he's considering voting for Reform UK.

Voter Geoff Meek shakes Rees-Mogg's hand during canvassing in Longwell Green

The theme continues at the next semi-detached home where a family are working on an extension outside. “We have always voted Tory but we’re feeling really disappointed,” says one of them. “People feel they [the Conservative Party] haven’t delivered on the things they promised to do. We are losing our culture because of mass migration.”

Sir Jacob accepts their frustration. “We made a mistake,” he says, pointing to an expanded migrant labour force after the Covid pandemic. Legal migration is coming back under control, he says.

But it doesn’t end there.

One of the family draws parallels between Sir Jacob, Nigel Farage and Reform UK. “Why not be Reform?” he asks. “The party is bigger than the leader – the membership of the party has the view I have,” replies Sir Jacob, who goes on to openly question the quality of candidates standing for Reform. “A vote for them is a vote for Lib Dems or Labour,” he adds.

But then he finds more support. Self-employed builder Geoff Meek, 58, stops work on a semi-detached property to shake Sir Jacob’s hand. “Things are going well for us,” he says, pointing to a rise in the national insurance threshold.

Martyn Chugg lives in former Tory MP Chris Skidmore’s old home. He shares a joke about putting up a blue plaque when Skidmore becomes PM

Couple David and Ann Hockney also warmly welcome Sir Jacob at the doorstep of their home, although Ms Hockney, 71, admits she's toying with voting for Reform UK. "Immigration," she says, when I ask why.

Down one cul-de-sac, at a large detached home, a woman who shakes Sir Jacob's hand jokes she won't wash her hands again. A retired man, Mike Morrison, standing outside his garage also gives the incumbent his backing.

The 87-year-old, who has lived in the area for 43 years, tells Sir Jacob the former Tory MP Chris Skidmore, who resigned from his Kingswood seat over Mr Sunak's oil and gas licence plan in January, used to live around the corner.

"The rotter," quips Mr Morrison.

That's the next stop; Mr Skidmore's old address, a detached home with a large driveway. Owner Martyn Chugg says he'll be voting for Sir Jacob, adding that Reform UK's manifesto is in "cuckoo land".

The 70-year-old says affordable housing is a big issue of the election, with his son in his thirties still living at the family home.

As I watch the canvassers begin to wrap up the morning's proceedings, plumber Anthony Murphy, 44, tells Sir Jacob he'll be voting Reform. "Nigel is the only one who talks sense," he tells me.

I ask Sir Jacob how it's gone.

Mark Bray says he's undecided on who to vote for. Asked what the big issues are locally, he points toward a 5G mast near his home

"It seems pretty encouraging," he says, "but you've got to be careful. People are nice and good-mannered, and if someone's polite to you it doesn't necessarily mean they will be voting Conservative for you. It's very easy to assume a friendly comment, even a selfie, means they are a supporter, but it's not always true."

Back in the office for lunch, where Sir Jacob has a Greggs ham and cheese sandwich and a box of eclairs, I put to him the possibility of losing his seat. "If you throw your hat in the ring, you must expect that sometimes people will throw the hat back at you," he says.

I then ask if he's worried it could provide a "Portillo" moment – when former Tory leader contender Michael Portillo was defeated in 1997 – on election night.

"If you look at the opinion polls, there can be about 100 Portillo moments," Sir Jacob adds, with a laugh. "Portillo will have bred and taken over the world if it's going quite the way the opinion polls indicate, so we'll have to wait and see what happens."

The interview ends, and I realise I've been sipping Sir Jacob's black coffee. "Oh, don't worry," he says, with a smile, as I leave

him to finish lunch with his agent and mother ahead of a busy afternoon of canvassing in the battle for his political career.

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Will hitting inflation target improve Tory fortunes?

Jeremy Hunt claims 'It wouldn't have happened under Labour' – but is he right? (PA)

SEAN O'GRADY

The headline annual rate of consumer price inflation has hit 2 per cent – bang on the official target, and for the first time in three years. It's obviously encouraging news, and the Conservatives will be hoping that it gives them a boost during what's been a difficult campaign. It was, after all, running at 11.1 per cent in the year to October 2022.

According to the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, the rate is low by international standards, and: "That would not have happened

under Labour, [who] refused to condemn the public-sector pay strikes that would have meant inflationary pay rises, inflation lasting longer."

However, underlying "core" inflation, excluding volatile food and fuel prices, is still running relatively high at 3.5 per cent, as it is in the services sector (5.9 per cent), while wages are still going up at about 5 per cent a year. These are also key measures monitored by the Bank of England. Experts therefore don't expect an interest-rate cut before August, at the earliest.

How much of the credit should go to the government?

Some. Critics say that ministers always insist, when inflation is high, that it has nothing to do with them and is all about global factors; but when it comes down, for whatever reason, suddenly they try to take all the credit. Thus, when the work and pensions secretary Mel Stride pitched up at Sky News, he said "We've brought inflation down," to which the acerbic interviewer, Kay Burley, replied: "That's nothing to do with you, is it?"

To be fair, Stride pointed out that fiscal policy – higher taxes and restraint on public spending and pay – has played its part, and he's right about that. No monetary policy run by a central bank can work efficiently if the government is operating a fiscal policy that pushes in the opposite direction – interest-rate rises offset by huge tax cuts, for example.

That is, of course, exactly what happened during the premiership of Liz Truss – a notable disaster. Rishi Sunak and Hunt fixed that – but ministers not being reckless, and working collaboratively with the Bank of England, is the very least that can be expected of any administration. Of course, it is also true that "baseline effects" have also brought inflation down sharply – because that is what happens statistically, unless, say, energy prices double every year.

Will it boost the Tories?

Not really. The problem is that the cost of living crisis is still going on; prices and rents are still rising, albeit at a slower rate; and any news about inflation will tend to remind people of what

they've been going through over the past few years. And voters may be inclined to credit the Bank of England and benevolent global factors rather than Sunak and his famous pledge to halve inflation (which has now been more than fulfilled).

What does it mean for the next government?

Assuming we will have a Labour administration, the underlying figures are a stark reminder that getting and keeping inflation down is a tough gig for the Bank of England, and it would be made even more difficult were there to be substantial spending increases and/or tax cuts. So even if the new government were contemplating such a fiscal boost (and Labour isn't), it would be hard to sustain, as Truss discovered.

Markets will probably have sufficient confidence in Rachel Reeves that interest rates will subside later this year (PA)

Until core or underlying inflation is squeezed down even further – and the last years are the hardest – there will be little scope for fiscal expansion or infrastructure investment under the restrictive "iron-clad" rules Rachel Reeves will impose upon herself.

The good news for Reeves is that the markets will probably have sufficient confidence in her, and in the Bank of England, that interest rates will subside later this year and into 2025, and that should boost investment and deliver the magic ingredient – growth in the national income – that helps everyone to make ends meet and the sums to add up.

Even so, restoring growth to the levels seen during the last Labour government will prove difficult. Productivity, international competitiveness and investment growth have usually been a challenge for the UK since the 1870s, and the situation noticeably worsened after the global financial crisis in 2008. It is currently being worsened by a combination of public and private debt overhangs, deglobalisation, ageing infrastructure and housing stock, shortages of both skilled and unskilled labour, planning restrictions – and, uniquely to the UK, Brexit.

Labour certainly has policies to deal with some of those obstacles to growth, but not all, and the intense political pressure to reduce migration will also keep depressing output expansion and living standards. The next five years won't be as tough as the last (pandemics and wars permitting), but they won't be boom times either. No wonder Labour is asking for "a decade of renewal".

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THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2024

News/ Exclusive

Briton in Qatar 'sting' faces 'deportation without justice'

Amnesty believes Qatar is using Manuel Guerrero Avina's case to criminalise LGBT+ people (Pictures by Guerrero Avina family)

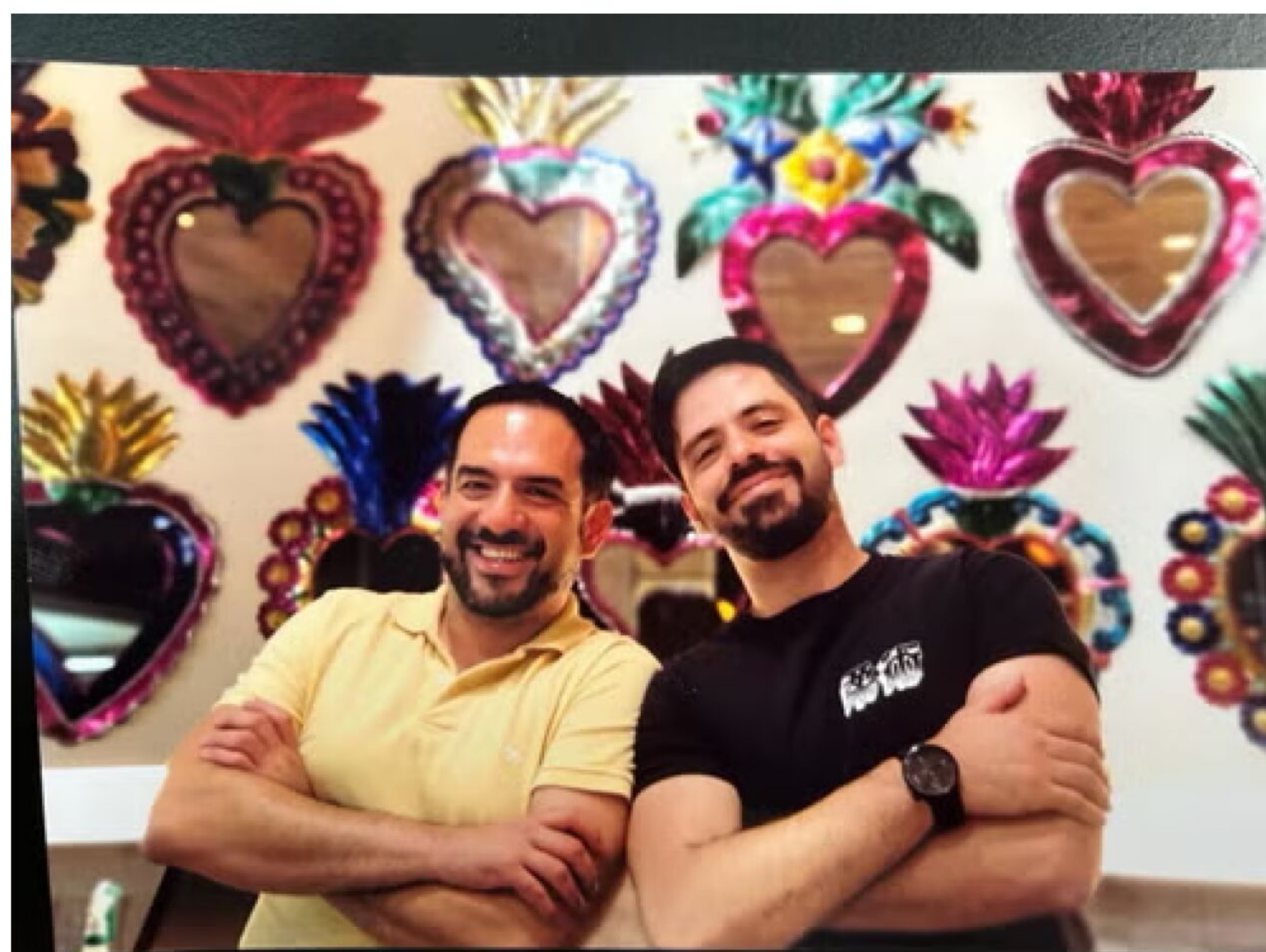
TARA COBHAM

A British-Mexican man who said he was tortured by Qatari authorities after being arrested in a Grindr sting is now facing deportation without justice, his family say.

Manuel Guerrero Avina's family also claimed his life was endangered as he was denied essential HIV medication when he was arbitrarily detained for more than six weeks in Qatar. They said Manuel was finally charged 78 days after his arrest on 4 February with allegedly false drug charges, all of which the 45-year-old strongly denies.

Amnesty International, FairSquare and the National Aids Trust are among those demanding Manuel's subsequent conviction be quashed, calling his trial before the Al Sadd Criminal Court in Doha "grossly unfair" and believing the Qatari authorities are using the case to stigmatise and criminalise LGBT+ people in a country known for its harsh laws against that community. James Lynch, co-director of FairSquare, and Deborah Gold, CEO of National Aids Trust, called on the UK government to step in.

Manuel, who used to live in Ealing in west London, was sentenced on 4 June to a suspended six-month prison term and a fine, according to his family – and they say he now faces being deported from Qatar without first getting justice.

Speaking to *The Independent* this week, Manuel's brother Enrique, 39, said: "It's very unfair because my brother is detained because he's gay, he was tortured because of his sexual orientation and HIV-positive status. We are still fighting and we will fight for justice and for the absolute freedom of Manuel."

Manuel with his brother Enrique who is a human rights lawyer based in Mexico City

Manuel, who has been a project manager for Qatar Airways in Doha for seven years, was reportedly arrested by plain-clothed security officials shortly after he agreed to meet a man through the dating app Grindr.

Enrique, a human rights lawyer based in Mexico City, believes the online profile of the person his brother agreed to meet was fake and had been created by law-enforcement officials to entrap him.

Both Amnesty and Manuel's family alleged the Qatari authorities detained Guerrero Avina without charge for 44 days, interrogating him without a lawyer about his sexual relations, and subjecting him to ill-treatment because of his sexual orientation and HIV-positive status.

Enrique claimed Manuel was placed in solitary confinement and denied access to food and water for 15 hours a day. He alleged the authorities also refused to provide his brother with essential HIV medication for a month following his arrest, with the virus subsequently showing as present in his blood after previously being undetectable. Enrique also said security officials threatened to whip Manuel if he did not unlock his phone to identify other LGBT+ people.

When he travelled to see Manuel in detention, Enrique described his brother as fearful, disoriented and suffering from post-traumatic stress. "It was terrible because it was so unfair," he said. "It was very dangerous."

Both Amnesty and Manuel's family also claimed security officials forced the 45-year-old to thumbprint a so-called confession in Arabic – which he did not understand. The human rights organisation said Manuel told a court that he denied all charges of possession of drugs and other drug-related offences six hours after signing the false confession.

Enrique and his family have been campaigning for justice

They said Manuel repeatedly asked for a lawyer while in detention but was not able to obtain legal advice until 15 March, and that the authorities also denied him access to documents relating to his case for more than two months.

Aya Majzoub, Amnesty International Middle East and North Africa deputy director, said: "The Qatari authorities must overturn Mr Guerrero Avina's outrageous conviction.

"There are serious fears that Guerrero Avina was targeted for his sexual orientation and was coerced into providing the authorities with information that they could use to pursue a wider crackdown on LGBTI individuals in Qatar. Qatar's authorities must urgently end the discrimination and persecution of people based on their sexual orientation and gender identities, and repeal all laws that discriminate against LGBTI people."

The human rights organisation said Qatar criminalises a range of same-sex consensual sexual acts and people found guilty can be jailed for up to seven years.

A Qatari official said: "Mr Aviña was arrested for possession of illegal substances. He acknowledged the possession of the seized substances ... A drug test later came back positive."

They said Manuel was arrested solely for the "possession and distribution of illegal drugs in Qatar" and that he has been "treated with respect and dignity throughout his detention".

Manuel has lived in Doha and worked as a project manager for Qatar Airways for seven years

They added that Manuel will have the opportunity to appeal the court ruling.

According to Manuel's family, his arrest report states nothing illegal was found on his person, while they strongly maintain that law-enforcement officials planted drugs in their search of his apartment on 4 February. Amnesty also said

the authorities have relied on a questionable handwritten urine test result.

Mr Lynch said: “The British government has a responsibility to make urgent representations to the Qatari government about the deeply unfair and discriminatory process their citizen has been subjected to. They must also press the Qatari authorities to stop the persecution of people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Ms Gold added: “We urge the British government to do all it can to ensure Manuel’s health, rights and wellbeing.”

A spokesperson for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said: “We are supporting a British man in Qatar and are in contact with his family.” The FCDO said it takes all allegations of mistreatment seriously and will always offer to raise these with local authorities but cannot interfere in the judicial affairs of other countries.

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Patient wins civil rape case against TV sex therapist

Ella Janneh speaks outside the High Court in London yesterday (PA)

REBECCA THOMAS
HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

The patient of a TV therapist has won a case over allegations he raped and sexually assaulted her during a session. Ella Janneh, 37, has been awarded more than £200,000 in damages after she brought a suit against Mike Lousada – a prominent sex coach who has appeared on shows such as *This Morning*, in articles for

major press outlets, and in a video series on Durex's YouTube channel.

Ms Janneh alleged in her civil suit that Lousada raped and sexually assaulted her on 18 August 2016 at his clinic in Belsize Park, during a therapy session to treat panic attacks she experienced when having consensual sex. Ms Janneh, who has waived her right to anonymity, had suffered sexual abuse as a child. The incident was reported to the Metropolitan Police the day after. However, in May 2018, the Crown Prosecution Service informed Ms Janneh it would not be pursuing a criminal prosecution.

Ms Janneh brought a civil suit, represented by law firm Leigh Day, and a trial was held over 10 days at the High Court in April and May. In a witness statement to the court, Ms Jannah said Lousada instructed her during the session to act like a child, triggering a "full-blown panic attack" and dissociation. Lousada proceeded to penetrate her and commit several sexual assaults.

He reportedly told her: "I think we should use my penis energetically to absorb the trauma. The head of the penis can act, like a laser beam and burn up the trauma." It was Lousada's claim that she had consented to the penetration, which Ms Jannah denied, and that he did not direct her to act like a child.

In a ruling yesterday, Mr Justice Baker said he had no doubt that Lousada instructed Ms Jannah to regress into her childlike state before touching her. He said this caused a dissociated state such that when Lousada suggested he would penetrate her vagina with his penis, she lacked the capacity to consent.

Mike Lousada has been ordered to pay more than £200,000 in damages (Durex UK/YouTube)

The judgment said: “I have no doubt that during the latter part of the session, the defendant did instruct the claimant to regress into her childhood state of being an abused child, after which he touched her in various ways, including kissing and essentially fondling her body, causing her to become dissociated.”

Mr Justice Barker said he had “no doubt” that what Ms Jannah had said in her police interviews in 2016 was a “truthful factual account of what had taken place”. He said: “I consider that an award of general damages of £105,000 is justified in this case.”

According to the judgment, in 2013 Lousada formed a voluntary professional body called the Association of Somatic and Integrative Sexologists (ASIS) to create ethical codes for those carrying out what he called “psychosexual somatic therapy”. Mr Justice Baker found Lousada, who is still able to practise, failed to inform his clients that he did not adhere to those codes.

He added: “Having listened with care to the defendant giving evidence in this case, I am satisfied that the scale of his confidence in his own abilities was such that his perception of reality became clouded by his sense of self-worth.” In a civil case the claimant has to satisfy a lower standard of proof than in a criminal one. A civil case requires the claimant to prove their case “on the balance of probabilities”, rather than “beyond reasonable doubt”.

Following the ruling, Catriona Rubens, from Leigh Day, said: "This judgment is a resounding victory for my client Ella Janneh, who has fought tirelessly to seek justice for Mr Lousada's rape and sexual assault of her in the name of 'therapy'. Serious questions now need to be asked of the system: the police, the CPS, and the fact that therapists like Mike Lousada can act outside any form of regulatory or ethical framework. It must not be left to survivors like Ella to fight individual civil claims, at huge personal cost, in order to bring sexual violence and abuse of power to light."

Following the court ruling, Lousada said in a statement: "I have told both the police and the court what happened that day, and you will appreciate that I am very disappointed that my evidence has been rejected. I no longer engage in this sort of work and have not done so since the incident in question. I was seeking to help Ms Janneh and never intended to cause her any harm. I have always regretted the outcome and the effects on her, and I wish her well for the future." Reckitt, which owns Durex, was approached for comment.

Rape Crisis offers support for those affected by rape and sexual abuse. You can call them on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in Scotland, and 0800 0246 991 in Northern Ireland, or visit their website at rapecrisis.org.uk

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Jury fails to reach verdict in trial of Marten and Gordon

Constance Marten and Mark Gordon had denied charges including manslaughter after the death of their newborn daughter Victoria (PA)

AMY-CLARE MARTIN
HOLLY EVANS

A jury has failed to reach verdicts in the trial of aristocrat Constance Marten and her partner Mark Gordon. Marten, 37, and her partner Gordon, 50, have been on trial accused of manslaughter after their newborn daughter Victoria died while they were camping on the South Downs in wintry conditions.

The parents were charged after the baby was found dead in an allotment shed in Brighton, East Sussex, last March following a high-profile police search for the couple and their child. The parents denied charges of gross negligence manslaughter of Victoria between 4 January and 27 February last year, and of causing or allowing the death of a child.

They also denied charges of perverting the course of justice by concealing her body, concealing the birth of a child, and child cruelty. A jury at the Old Bailey deliberated for 72 hours and 33 minutes but was unable to reach verdicts. The judge, Mark Lucraft KC, discharged the jury yesterday, almost six months after the trial began. The prosecution will now have to consider whether to seek a retrial.

Mr Lucraft said he would be writing to each of the jurors to thank them, and that they would be excused from jury service for the rest of their lives. He said they had shown "truly exceptional examples of dedication to public service" since the trial started in January.

Marten, wearing a blue blouse and dark trousers, was separated by a dock officer from Gordon, who was dressed in a blue shirt and navy tie as the jury was discharged.

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Just Stop Oil activists cover Stonehenge in orange paint

Rishi Sunak has condemned the attack ahead of today's summer solstice as a 'disgraceful act of vandalism' (Just Stop Oil/PA)

ATHENA STAVROU

Climate protesters have doused Stonehenge in orange paint on the eve of the summer solstice. Two Just Stop Oil activists began spraying rocks at the ancient site at around noon yesterday. Thousands of visitors are expected to descend on the site today to celebrate the longest day of the year.

The attack has been met with condemnation by the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, who said the group should be "ashamed" of the "disgraceful act of vandalism". The group took action to

draw attention to their demand that the next government sign up to a legally binding treaty to phase out fossil fuels by 2030.

Video footage of the protest shows two people in Just Stop Oil T-shirts, named by the group as Rajan Naidu, 73, and Niamh Lynch, 21, running towards the ancient structure with canisters of orange powder paint. As they begin spraying the rocks, calls for them to stop can be heard from onlookers as other visitors chase after them attempting to take their canisters away.

English Heritage says experts are assessing the 'extent of the damage' to the stones (Just Stop Oil/PA)

Ms Lynch, a student from Oxford, said: "Stonehenge at solstice is all about celebrating the natural world – but look at the state it's in! We all have a right to live a life free from suffering, but continued burning of oil, coal and gas is leading to death and suffering on an unparalleled scale.

"It's time for us to think about what our civilisation will leave behind – what is our legacy? Standing inert for generations works well for stones – not climate policy," she said in quotes provided by Just Stop Oil.

Both Sir Keir Starmer and Mr Sunak condemned the attack, with the prime minister calling it "a disgraceful act of vandalism to one of the UK's and the world's oldest and most important monuments". He added: "Just Stop Oil should be ashamed of their activists, and they and anyone associated with them, including a certain Labour Party donor, should issue a condemnation of this shameful act immediately."

Labour leader Sir Keir said: “The damage done to Stonehenge is outrageous. Just Stop Oil are pathetic. Those responsible must face the full force of the law.”

Thousands are expected to descend on Stonehenge today for the summer solstice (AP)

Wiltshire Police said officers had attended the scene and arrested two people.

“Either we end the fossil fuel era, or the fossil fuel era will end us,” Mr Naidu said in quotes provided by Just Stop Oil. “The orange cornflour we used to create an eye-catching spectacle will soon wash away with the rain, but the urgent need for effective government action to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of the climate and ecological crisis will not. Sign the treaty!”

English Heritage said experts were assessing the “extent of the damage” to the stones, which they describe as perhaps the world’s most famous prehistoric monument.

A spokesperson said: “Orange powdered paint has been thrown at a number of the stones at Stonehenge. Obviously this is extremely upsetting, and our curators are investigating the extent of the damage. Stonehenge remains open to the public.”

The monument remains open to the public (Just Stop Oil)

Around 8,000 people gathered at Stonehenge to mark the longest day of the year in 2023, with similar numbers expected today. It was built in several stages, with the first being an early henge monument erected about 5,000 years ago. The stone circle was erected in the late Neolithic period, around 2,500BC. Burial mounds were built nearby in the early Bronze Age.

Yesterday's action came days after Labour's manifesto recommitted the party to stopping all future licences for new oil and gas, should it form the next government. The group praised the party for committing to their original demand of no new oil and gas, but added that this "is not enough".

A Just Stop Oil spokesperson said: "Failure to commit to defending our communities will mean Just Stop Oil supporters, along with citizens from Austria, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland, will join in resistance this summer, if their own governments do not take meaningful action.

"Stone circles can be found in every part of Europe, showing how we've always cooperated across vast distances – we're building on that legacy."

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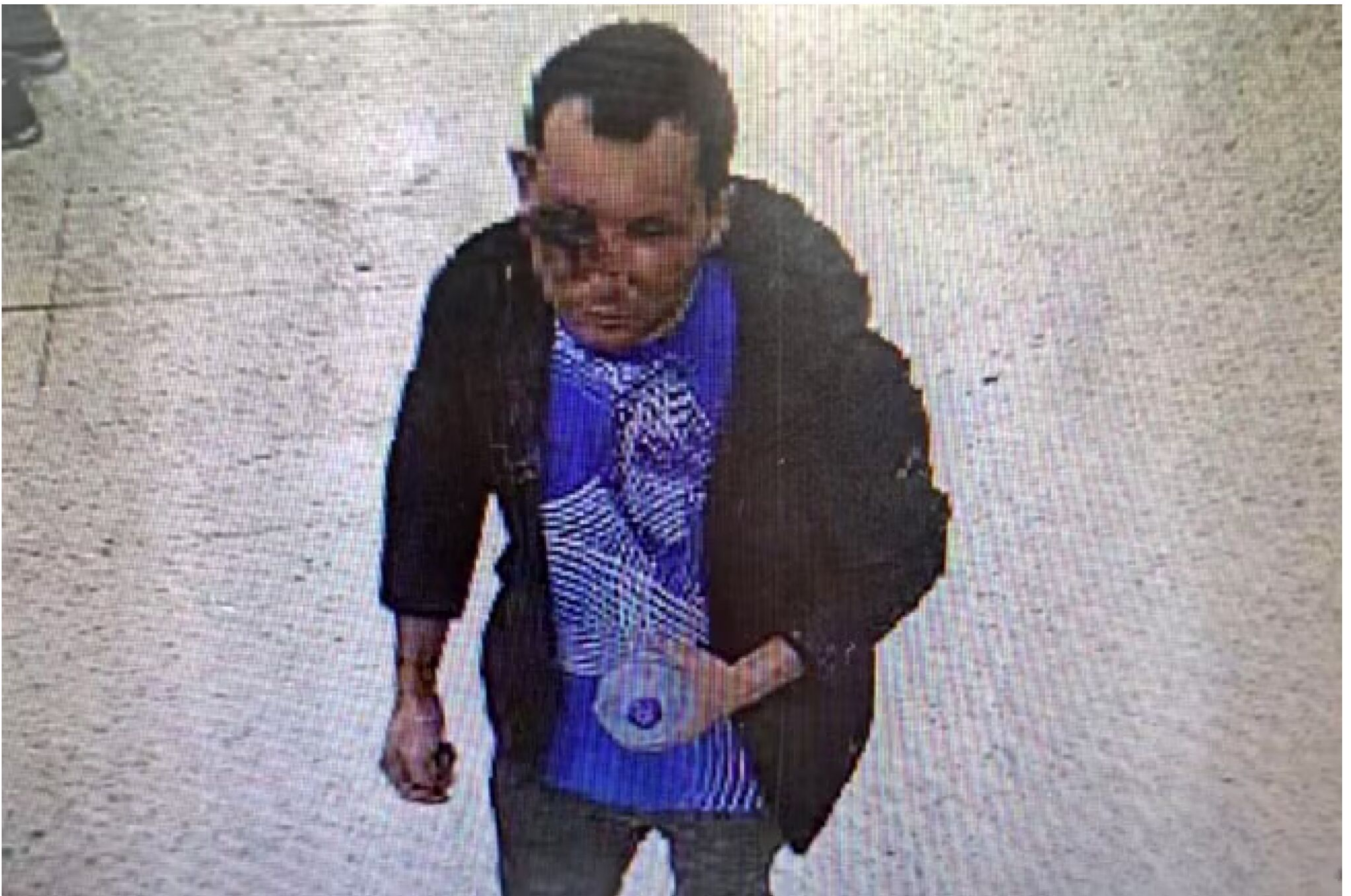
Acid attacks soar by 75%

With a growing number of female victims, says charity

Abdul Ezedi targeted a mother with a corrosive substance earlier this year (Metropolitan Police/AFP)

AMY-CLARE MARTIN
CRIME CORRESPONDENT

Acid attacks have surged by 75 per cent with growing numbers of female victims, it has been revealed. Figures from police forces in England and Wales show at least 1,244 offences involving corrosive substances were recorded last year, up from just 710 in 2022.

The latest rise comes after a 69 per cent year-on-year increase was also recorded in 2022 as experts warn the escalating problem is a "huge concern".

Worrying, only 8 per cent of attacks resulted in a perpetrator being charged, according to the figures from Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI). The charity has called for urgent action from the winner of the general election amid fears the true total is likely to be even higher due to under-reporting by victims.

The data, obtained via Freedom of Information Requests made to police forces, comes after a mother was critically injured in a horrifying alkali attack in Clapham, southwest London, earlier this year.

Abdul Ezedi had travelled to London from Newcastle to douse his former girlfriend in a corrosive substance in the 31 January attack, which also saw her two children injured.

Ezedi, 35, fled the scene but is believed to have taken his own life after his body was pulled from the Thames by police.

According to friends, the mother was still in critical care having lost sight in at least one of her eyes a month after the attack.

ASTI found that out of the 1,244 recorded offences last year, over a third were physical offences against the person, while 790 offences included threats of corrosive attacks, carrying of corrosives, and other serious crimes involving corrosives, such as rape or robbery.

Their executive director Jaf Shah warned: "There has to be action taken about threats from the beginning to prevent those threats from escalating into physical attacks."

The area near Tower Pier on the River Thames where the body of Abdul Ezedi was recovered (PA)

While acid attacks in the UK have often been associated with male-on-male violence, recent trends show it is increasingly being linked to violence against women and girls.

Half of all corrosive offences last year were against women – with some 502 female victims out of 1001 offences where gender data was available. This rises to over 59 per cent for threats of violence.

"Our new data shows that acid violence is an escalating problem in our country, with women increasingly at risk," Mr Shah added. "With a new government soon in place, we are asking our leaders to take urgent action and stop these atrocious crimes which leave victims forever scarred."

The North East of England is also disproportionately affected with a "shocking" number of attacks recorded in Northumbria, where a fifth of all corrosive violent offences took place last year – including 81 violent physical attacks. Most commonly, ammonia was used by perpetrators.

They recorded more incidents than the capital, with the Met Police recording 72 violent physical attacks.

Professor Francisco C Figueiredo, an ophthalmology expert at Newcastle University, said: "Over the last five years there has been a concerning rise in the incidence of acid attacks especially in the North East of England.

“Eight per cent of the victims are young Caucasian males and 90 per cent of them are not reported to Northumbria Police. Ammonia is the most common chemical used in the North East of England area.

“Using noxious chemicals to cause harm, and ocular harm in particular, is becoming a popular mode of assault in the UK, and is a serious medical and social concern which requires further investigation to be able to increase public awareness, implement stricter regulations, better surveillance and means of prevention, as well as to provide adequate support to the victims.”

Acid violence too often goes unpunished with only 8 per cent of the cases leading to a charge or a summons, the charity said. In many cases survivors live in fear of reprisal attacks, with almost a third of victims withdrawing support for police action despite officers identifying a suspect.

Dr Matt Hopkins, associate professor in Criminology at the University of Leicester, said the increase was a “huge concern”.

“However, we should also keep in mind that the incidents tend to be concentrated in a select number of areas and we need to further explore whether this is a product of better police recording and identify what types of substances are being used in the attacks to be able to improve prevention,” he added.

A Home Office spokesperson said: “Attacks on people involving acids or other corrosives can result in huge distress and life changing injuries. Under the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, it is illegal to sell and deliver corrosive products to people under 18 and possess corrosive substances in public.”

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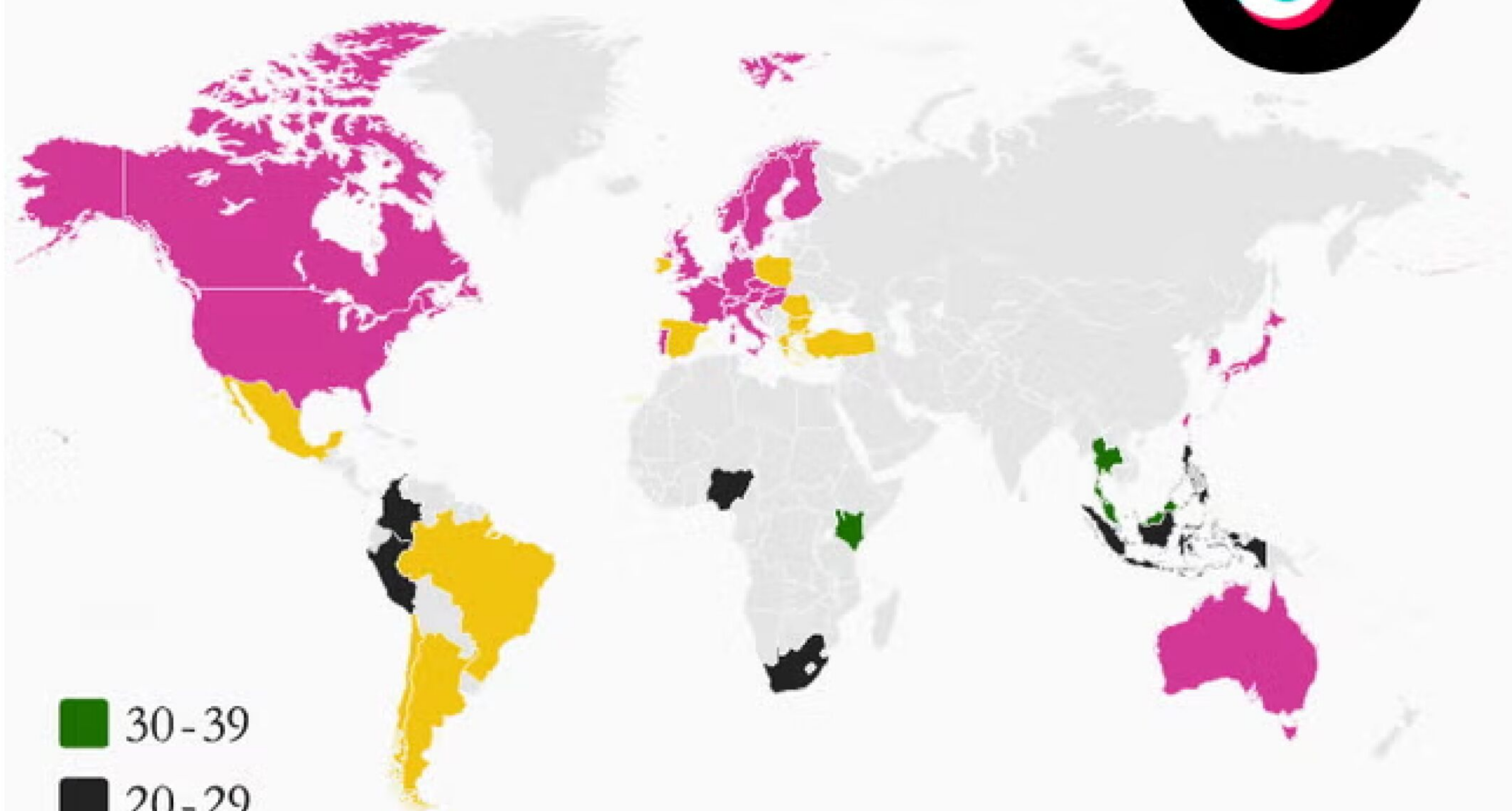
By Numbers China in your hand

Share of respondents in selected countries who used TikTok for news in the week prior to the survey (in %)

30-39
20-29
10-19
0-9

39% Thailand
36% Kenya
31% Malaysia

4% United Kingdom
4% Austria
4% Czech Republic
3% Denmark

Approx 2,000 respondents surveyed in 45 markets, January and February 2024

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024

Pictures of the Day

Cycle of violence

A woman bikes beneath dresses donated by survivors of sexual abuse as part of an art exhibition in The Hague. *EPA*

Shot in the dark

The Ukrainian National Guard fires a mortar towards Russian troops in the Kharkiv region. *Reuters*

Style in sync

Women parade during the annual Ojude Oba festival in Ijebu Ode, Nigeria. *Getty*

Horseplay

A rider cools off in the Iber River during a hot spell in Mitrovica, Kosovo. *Reuters*

Live stream

Water-bikers enjoy the fruits of the Ulster Canal restoration in Clones Marina, County Monaghan. *PA*

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Home news in brief

Jay Slater, 19, has been missing on Tenerife since Monday after apparently getting lost (Supplied)

Mother of missing teen believes son 'taken against will'

The mother of a British teenager who is missing in Tenerife said having to search for her son has been "horrendous". Jay Slater, 19, from Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, was last heard from on Monday morning as he told a friend he planned to walk back to his accommodation after missing a bus. Debbie Duncan flew to Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands on Tuesday morning to search for her son. Ms Duncan said she feared her son, who is an apprentice bricklayer, had "been taken against his will".

"It's just traumatic and it doesn't feel real. It's just awful, it's horrendous. I think he's been taken against his will with what's been said, but it's in the hands of the police." She added that the police leading the search had been "very good".

Mr Slater's friend Lucy – who had gone to the island with him to attend the NRG music festival – told the *Manchester Evening News* that he had gone to stay with people he had met on holiday after a night out. She said she had received a call from Mr Slater at around 8.15am local time on Monday after he missed the bus and was trying to walk back, during which he said he was lost, needed a drink of water, and had only 1 per cent battery on his phone.

Mr Slater's phone then cut off, with his last location showing as the Rural de Teno park – a mountainous area popular with hikers. Lucy said one of the people Mr Slater had met had driven them back to his apartment in a hire car and that Mr Slater had not realised how far away it was. "He's ended up out in the middle of nowhere. Jay was obviously thinking he would be able to get home from there," she said. "But then in the morning he's set off walking, using his maps on his phone, and ended up in the middle of mountains with nothing around."

Baby girl dies after being mauled by family dog

A seven-month-old girl has been mauled to death by her family's dog at her Coventry home. She was rushed to hospital on Sunday afternoon after suffering serious head injuries, but later died. The animal, which police say wasn't classed as a dangerous breed, was humanely destroyed.

A West Midlands Police spokesperson said: "We were called to a property at Shorncliffe Road shortly after 3pm on Sunday. Together with our ambulance colleagues, we arrived within minutes. A seven-month-old baby girl had received serious injuries to her head after being bitten by the family's dog inside the home. She received treatment at the scene by paramedics before being rushed to hospital for further treatment. Tragically,

she died a short time later. Our thoughts remain with her family at this devastating time."

Teenager who murdered boy on dancefloor jailed for life

A teenager who stabbed a 17-year-old boy three times in the chest on a crowded dancefloor after a confrontation over a girl has been jailed for life. Charlie Cosser was found lying on the ground with blood covering his chest at an outdoor event called BalFest, at a farmhouse in Warnham, West Sussex, on 23 July last year. He was killed after a fight broke out between his killer, who can now be named as Yura Varybrus, and Charlie and two other boys, after Varybrus was asked to leave the party.

Varybrus denied the murder but was convicted by a jury at Brighton Crown Court, and has now been given a minimum term of 16 years. Jurors heard that Varybrus had drunk an "excessive amount" of vodka and was angry after unsuccessful attempts had been made to make him leave the event due to his apparent behaviour towards a young woman. Varybrus was later spotted next to the road with his hands and trousers "covered in blood". Another witness told jurors that they had overheard the teenager saying: "I've stabbed someone."

Since the incident, the victim's family have set up a charity called Charlie's Promise, dedicated to fighting knife crime across Surrey and the UK.

AI used to secretly detect train passengers' emotions

Passengers on trains across the UK had their emotions recorded by AI cameras without their knowledge, it has been revealed. The images were sent for analysis by Amazon Rekognition software, which detects what someone appears to be feeling, for instance whether they look happy, sad or hungry.

Network Rail took photographs of people passing through ticket barriers as part of a trial launched in 2022, according to documents obtained by civil liberties group Big Brother Watch. The system, piloted at stations including London Euston,

Glasgow, Leeds and Reading, also recorded demographic details, such as a passenger's gender and age range. In the documents, obtained in response to a freedom of information request, Network Rail said this analysis could be used to "measure satisfaction" and "maximise advertising and retail revenue".

Jake Hurfurt, head of research and investigations at Big Brother Watch, said: "Network Rail had no right to deploy discredited emotion recognition technology against unwitting commuters at some of Britain's biggest stations, and I have submitted a complaint to the information commissioner about this trial."

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Putin and Kim Jong-un sign mutual defence agreement

Russia and North Korea pact sparks fears in the West

Russian president Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un shake hands after signing a bilateral agreement in Pyongyang yesterday (AFP/Getty)

SHWETA SHARMA
CHRIS STEVENSON

Vladimir Putin has signed a deal with Kim Jong-un that includes a mutual defence pact if either Russia or North Korea is attacked – a move that will alarm Western nations.

Desperate for arms to fuel his invasion of Ukraine, Mr Putin has sought to deepen ties with another international pariah also under heavy sanctions during his first visit to Pyongyang in 24 years. Mr Kim and Mr Putin signed what they described as the "strongest ever treaty" during the Russian leader's trip. The deal, which the leaders said covered areas including security, trade, investment, and cultural and humanitarian ties, could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War.

The courting of Mr Kim, which includes gifts of limousines and the "strategic partnership" pact, has alarmed the United States and its Asian allies. Their spy agencies are trying to work out just how far the 71-year-old Kremlin chief will go – and what missile or even nuclear technology Russia might pass to North Korea in exchange for munitions to fight in Ukraine.

The devil will be in the detail of the Russia-North Korea deal, which has not been released. But it will add to the insecurity in nations such as South Korea and Japan about the growing tensions between Washington and its allies and the emerging axis of China, Russia and North Korea. While China has kept itself out of trilateral deals so far, Beijing is North Korea's largest trading partner and Mr Putin has also sought to maximise his political relations with President Xi Jinping.

Mr Kim said the two countries had a "fiery friendship" and that the deal was their "strongest ever treaty", putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Mr Putin called it a "breakthrough document", reflecting shared desires to move relations to a higher level.

Putin and Kim attend an official welcoming ceremony during their meeting in Pyongyang (EPA)

Mr Kim offered a red carpet welcome to Mr Putin, greeting the Russian leader with a hug at the airport on Tuesday night. They left in the same limousine to the Kumsusan State Guest House.

Mr Putin was welcomed yesterday morning in a ceremony at the city's main square, filled with what appeared to be tens of thousands of spectators, including children with balloons and people in coordinated T-shirts of the red, white and blue national colours of both countries. Crowds lining the streets waved flowers and flags and chanted: "Welcome Putin."

Mr Putin and Mr Kim saluted an honour guard and walked across a red carpet. Mr Kim introduced key members of his leadership including foreign minister Choe Son Hui, top aide and ruling party secretary Jo Yong Won, and the leader's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong.

The two leaders held one-to-one talks for about two hours, according to reports, and hosted a lavish ceremony for the guests. Mr Kim called the Russian leader "the most honest friend and ally" of North Korea and referred to him as "the dearest friend of the Korean people".

Mr Putin thanked Mr Kim for his support for the Ukraine war, part of what he said was a "fight against the imperialist hegemonistic policies of the US and its satellites against the Russian Federation".

The two had a “friendly chat” and “exchanged their pent-up inmost thoughts”, state media said. The Russian delegation included foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, first deputy prime minister Denis Manturov, and defence minister Andrei Belousov. Other top officials were the health and transport ministers and the head of Russia’s space agency.

The leaders ride in an Aurus gifted to Putin by Kim (EPA)

The two leaders exchanged gifts after the talks. Mr Putin presented Mr Kim with a Russian-made Aurus limousine and other gifts, including a tea set and a naval officer’s dagger. Mr Kim’s presents to Mr Putin included artworks depicting the Russian leader.

Mr Putin also drove Mr Kim in the limousine during the visit, Russian state TV showed.

Western nations hit out at the visit before the signing of the deal. In Washington, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said Mr Putin’s visit to North Korea illustrates how Russia tries, "in desperation, to develop and to strengthen relations with countries that can provide it with what it needs to continue the war of aggression that it started against Ukraine."

Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said Mr Putin’s visit showed he was “dependent” on authoritarian leaders for support. “Their closest friends and the biggest supporters of the Russian war effort – war of aggression – [are] North Korea, Iran and China,” he said.

Along with China, Russia has provided political cover for Mr Kim's efforts to advance his nuclear arsenal, repeatedly blocking US-led efforts to impose fresh UN sanctions on the North over its weapons tests.

In March, a Russian veto in the Security Council ended monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear programme, prompting Western accusations that Moscow is seeking to avoid scrutiny as it buys weapons from Pyongyang.

Dr Colin Alexander, a political communications expert at Nottingham Trent University, told *The Independent* that Russia-North Korea ties are not as close as they were during the Cold War. But it is the desperate need for support that has pushed Moscow into the embrace of Pyongyang.

"Russia is currently struggling for international support, with the UN and most of the international community disapproving of its actions in Ukraine. A global power in a situation like this is more likely to reach out to whoever is willing," he said.

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Hundreds of pilgrims die in intense Saudi Arabia heat

Shade seekers: some of the 1.83 million Muslims who gathered for Hajj this year (AP)

SAMY MAGDY

Hundreds have died during this year's Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, with temperatures as high as 51C recorded this week.

Saudi Arabia has not commented on the death toll during the pilgrimage – a ritual that every able Muslim is required to undertake once in their life – nor offered any cause of death for those who have died. However, hundreds of people lined up at

the emergency complex in the neighbourhood of al-Muaisem in Mecca, trying to get information about their missing family members.

One list circulating online suggested that at least 550 people died during the five-day Hajj. One medic, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss information not released publicly by the government, said that the names listed appeared to be genuine. That medic and another official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said they believed there were at least 600 bodies at the facility. The list of names did not specify cause of death.

At least 323 of those who died were Egyptians, most of them succumbing to heat-related illnesses, according to two Arab diplomats tasked with coordinating their countries' responses. "All of [the Egyptians] died because of heat" except for one who sustained fatal injuries during a minor crowd crush, one of the diplomats said.

One hundred and forty-four Indonesian citizens died during Hajj, according to data the Indonesian health ministry shared on Tuesday. The data did not specify whether any of the deaths were due to heat stroke.

Each year, the Hajj draws hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from low-income nations, "many of whom have had little, if any, pre-Hajj healthcare", an article in the April edition of the *Journal of Infection and Public Health* said.

Temperatures hit 51.8C at the Grand Mosque in Mecca on Monday, the Saudi national meteorology centre said. On Tuesday, the mercury reached 47C. Onlookers saw some people faint while trying to perform the symbolic stoning of the devil. Others, including many Egyptians, lost track of their loved ones in the heat and the crowds.

Pilgrims in Mina, near the holy city of Mecca, cast stones at pillars in the symbolic stoning of the devil (AP)

More than 1.83 million Muslims have performed the Hajj in 2024, including more than 1.6 million pilgrims from 22 countries and around 222,000 Saudi citizens and residents, according to the Saudi Hajj authorities.

Yesterday, at the medical complex in Mecca, an Egyptian man collapsed to the ground when he heard the name of his mother listed among the dead. He cried for some time before grabbing his mobile phone and calling a travel agent, shouting: “He left her to die!” as the crowd tried to calm him.

Security appeared to be tight at the complex, with an official reading out names of the dead and their nationalities. They included people from Algeria, Egypt and India. Those who said they were relatives of the dead were allowed inside to identify their loved ones.

It was not possible to independently confirm cause of death at the complex. Saudi officials did not respond to questions seeking more information.

The kingdom’s ruling al-Saud family maintains a major influence in the Muslim world through its oil wealth and its management of Islam’s holiest sites. Like Saudi monarchs before him, King Salman has taken the title of the custodian of the two holy mosques, referring to the Grand Mosque in Mecca – home to

the cube-shaped Kaaba, which Muslims pray towards five times a day – and the Prophet's Mosque in the nearby city of Medina.

Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars on crowd control and safety measures for those attending the annual five-day pilgrimage, but the sheer number of participants makes ensuring their safety difficult.

The climate crisis could make the risk even greater. A 2019 study by experts at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that even if the world succeeds in mitigating the worst effects of climate change, the Hajj would be held in temperatures exceeding an "extreme danger threshold" from 2047 to 2052, and from 2079 to 2086.

Islam follows a lunar calendar, so the Hajj falls around 11 days earlier each year. In 2030, the Hajj will occur in April, and over the next several years it will fall in the winter, when temperatures are milder.

A 2015 stampede in Mina during the Hajj killed more than 2,400 pilgrims, the deadliest incident ever to strike the pilgrimage. Saudi Arabia has never acknowledged the full toll of the stampede. A separate crane collapse at Mecca's Grand Mosque, which preceded the Mina disaster, killed 111 people. The second-deadliest incident at Hajj was a stampede in 1990 that killed 1,426 people.

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Ex of Pelosi hammer-attack suspect thrown out of court

Gypsy Taub was forced to leave after the judge accused her of tampering with the jury (AP)

AMELIA NEATH
GUSTAF KILANDER

A pro-nudist campaigner, whose former partner is charged with attacking ex-House speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband with a hammer, has been expelled from court after allegedly trying to tamper with the jury in his trial. Gypsy Taub, the former partner of defendant David DePape, was barred from entering the public

gallery and the second floor of the San Fransisco courthouse where DePape's state trial was coming to an end, according to the Associated Press.

DePape, 44, was convicted last month and sentenced to 30 years in prison after being found guilty of attempted kidnapping of a federal official and assault on the immediate family member of a federal official. Prosecutors found that DePape had attacked Ms Pelosi's husband, Paul Pelosi, who was 82 at the time, with a hammer after he broke into their San Fransisco home in October 2022.

Following his conviction in the federal trial, DePape is now undergoing a state trial stemming from the break-in. The action to throw Ms Taub out came after the judge said she was trying to tamper with the jury. On Monday and Tuesday, Ms Taub, who is a high-profile pro-nudist activist in the Bay Area, was reportedly handing out pieces of paper with a website address on them.

David DePape was convicted of attempting to kidnap Nancy Pelosi and attacking her husband with a hammer (AP)

This website, which Ms Taub runs, promotes conspiracy theories. The same website address was then also discovered on Tuesday graffitied in a women's bathroom near the courtroom. The website reportedly includes false conspiracies about the trial, ABC7 reports. "You have been trying to corruptly influence one or more jury members," San Francisco Superior Court judge Harry Dorfman said before he asked two bailiffs to escort Ms Taub out of the courtroom.

The judge barred her from the court before DePape's attorney, Adam Lipson, then proceeded to present his closing arguments to the jury. He claimed that DePape had been living a solitary life and had gone "down the rabbit hole of propaganda and conspiracy theories" at the time he had broken into the Pelosi's home under two years ago.

DePape faces charges of attempting to sway a witness, false imprisonment, residential burglary, threatening a family member of a public official, and aggravated kidnapping. Mr Lipson is arguing that while his client was guilty of three of the charges, he claimed that prosecutors had not presented enough evidence to convict him of threatening a family member of a public official or aggravated kidnapping.

Paul and Nancy Pelosi attending the Vanity Fair Oscar party in Beverly Hills in March (Getty)

The attorney argued against the kidnapping charge by telling the jury that prosecutors did not prove DePape kidnapped Mr Pelosi with the intent "to exact from another person money or something valuable", AP reported. Prosecutors have said that the thing DePape wanted from the alleged kidnapping was to create a video of Ms Pelosi confessing to crimes he believed she had committed, but Mr Lipson argued that the video did not exist and even if it did, it would not have had value.

"When he broke into the Pelosis's home, his intent was to confront and potentially hurt and assault Nancy Pelosi. That was his intent at that time; that has nothing to do with Mr Pelosi," he

argued. However, assistant district attorney Phoebe Maffei argued against this, saying that DePape actually told a detective he planned to get a crime-confessing video of Ms Pelosi and post it on the internet, the outlet said. “There is inherent value in a video of the speaker of the House confessing to crimes in her own home,” Ms Maffei rebutted.

DePape eventually testified in the federal trial that he decided to go after Ms Pelosi as a means of getting her to admit alleged lies and corruption. He told the jury his plan was not to kidnap her but to interrogate her on camera in a unicorn costume. He also admitted he broke into the Pelosis’s San Francisco home around 2am on 28 October 2022, and that he was set to take the then speaker hostage and “break her kneecaps” if she lied to him. He also admitted to striking Mr Pelosi with a hammer after police appeared at the residence. He said his plan to put a stop to what he saw as government corruption was coming apart.

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World news in brief

The Indian capital swelters as a heatwave sweeps the north of the country, claiming dozens of lives (AFP)

Delhi records hottest ever night temperature

At least five more people have died of heat-related causes in Delhi as a heatwave sweeps northern India. The poor and the homeless have been hit the hardest and they accounted for all the latest fatalities.

Frequent power cuts and water shortages have compounded the struggles of the capital's 20 million residents. Several dozen people, mostly labourers, security guards and outdoors workers,

have been admitted to hospitals with symptoms related to heatstroke.

Delhi experienced the hottest night ever yesterday with the minimum temperature of 35.2C, eight degrees above normal, according to the weather department. It was the hottest night since records began in 1969, breaking the previous record of 34.7C on 3 June 2010.

Northern India has been reeling under a prolonged heatwave this summer with temperatures hovering around at 45C for days. The country has reported hundreds of deaths from heatstroke since May, including dozens of workers engaged in conducting the national election that concluded earlier this month.

Ramaphosa sworn in as South Africa president

Cyril Ramaphosa was sworn in for a second term as South Africa's president yesterday in a ceremony in the administrative capital Pretoria. Mr Ramaphosa, 71, is now set to appoint a cabinet in a new coalition government after his African National Congress party lost its parliamentary majority in an election last month.

The ANC made a deal with its long-time rival Democratic Alliance (DA) and other parties to form a coalition government. He was re-elected president by MPs on Friday with help from the DA a smaller third party that have joined the ANC in a coalition agreement to co-govern Africa's most industrialised economy.

Mr Ramaphosa was sworn in at the Union Buildings, the seat of government, by Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. "Through the ballots that they have cast, the people of South Africa have made plain their expectation that the leaders of our country should work together," he said.

Russia sentences US soldier to four years in jail

A Russian court yesterday sentenced an American soldier to three years and nine months in a penal colony for stealing and threatening murder, state news media reported. Gordon Black, 34, was detained in Vladivostok in Russia's far east on 2 May. He was there to see Alexandra Vashchuk, a woman he believed to be his girlfriend, and was arrested after being accused of assaulting her and stealing 10,000 rubles (£90) from her, according to state news agency Tass.

He "forcefully grabbed the girl by the neck, which she perceived as a real threat to her life", and then stole money from her wallet, the prosecutor said. Black denied making a threat, but admitted partial guilt for stealing the money. He intends to appeal the ruling. Black's sentencing further complicates US relations with Russia, which have grown increasingly tense as the fighting in Ukraine continues.

Filipino sailors injured in skirmish with Chinese coastguard

At least eight Filipino naval personnel were injured this week in a confrontation with the Chinese coastguard while delivering supplies to a military outpost on the disputed Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, the Philippines foreign ministry said yesterday.

The ministry denounced the incident, in which one Filipino lost their thumb, as "illegal and aggressive". The supply mission involved two rubber boats of the Philippine navy which were blocked by Chinese coast guard speedboats, leading to a scuffle and collisions on 17 June.

Five of the injured were rescued by a Philippine coastguard patrol ship supporting the supply mission. The Chinese coast guard damaged, emptied, and abandoned the rubber supply boats after towing them away, the Philippines foreign ministry said.

The Chinese coast guard accused the Philippine Navy of sparking the confrontation by sailing one of their boats dangerously close to a Chinese vessel. China's foreign ministry

described their coast guard’s actions as “professional and lawful”, asserting that the Philippine vessels were delivering construction material to the disputed island.

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'Radio Rishi' a masterclass in how not to do a phone-in

Rishi Sunak told presenter Nick Ferrari during his LBC election phone-in: 'You're sighing – but what do you expect me to say?' (LBC)

JOHN RENTOUL

After four bruising weeks of a six-week election campaign, it seemed to be dawning on the prime minister during yesterday morning's hour-long radio phone-in that a lot of people dislike him. He tried to sound upbeat and sympathetic to the complaints about how hard life is

in Tory Britain – but there was an air of resignation about several of his answers.

"I'm sorry you feel like that," he said more than once to callers who were cross about his record. "I don't suppose I will persuade you otherwise."

Towards the end of the phone-in – presented by Nick Ferrari on LBC – Rishi Sunak said: "We are almost done with this interview and we haven't talked about migration or security." Ferrari immediately put Rachel from Bexley through, who wanted to complain that the Rwanda deportation scheme was a waste of money. Sunak wasn't able to convince her, either.

With time running out the prime minister took a call from Sophie, who was furious about the growth in the number of food banks. His answer was that he wanted to encourage the creation of good jobs. Ferrari made a sceptical noise. Sunak demanded: "You're sighing – but what do you expect me to say?"

He had, by then, tried several different ways of sounding sympathetic, some of which were less successful than others. His attempt to identify with the joy of home ownership, remembering when he got his first flat, went down badly with callers such as Sophie who told him twice that he was "richer than the King".

Sunak chafed at questions from callers about "polls and process", usually with Ferrari following up to press him. He was asked by one caller whether he would stay on as an MP if he was kicked out of No 10. "Of course I'll do that."

He was asked by another why he thought he could win a general election "when you couldn't even win in your own party". To which his answer was that he was proved right. "I was right in that Liz Truss election and I am right about the economy now."

But the most revealing exchange was with Theresa from Ladbroke Grove, who said that the NHS had "gone from five stars to one star in 10 to 12 years", and that she was afraid to go into hospital for her treatment for breast cancer. "If I had known how bad it was going to be, I would have gone private," she said.

He keeps trying to blame NHS staff for going on strike, but most voters think it is his job to settle the strikes and turn the NHS around

Sunak expressed sympathy, and even on this occasion managed to sound sincere when he said to her: “Stick on the line and we can get your details”, and promised to follow up her case.

But when Ferrari followed up by asking about the front-page story in that morning’s *Daily Telegraph* – about cancer care in Britain being 20 years behind the rest of Europe – the prime minister simply played dumb: “I haven’t seen that.”

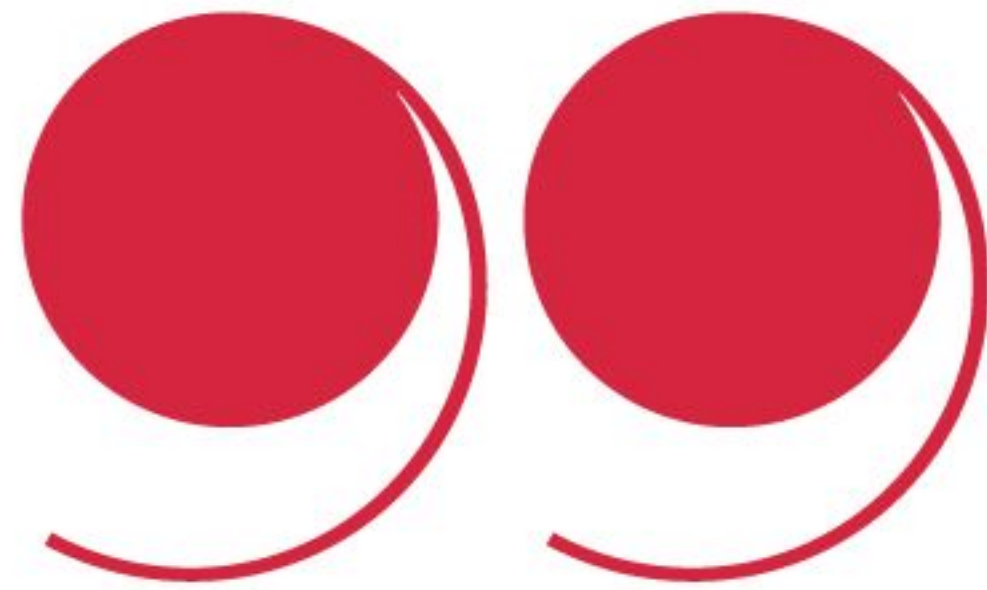
Ferrari didn’t let go. Surely someone had brought such an important study, from Macmillan Cancer Support, to his attention? “I haven’t seen the details,” Sunak clarified, and started to recite his standard briefing on cancer care.

Still Ferrari persisted, wanting to know how he responded to this specific report. “It makes me want to work harder to fix it,” Sunak said, reinforcing the impression of him as a bright, well-meaning technocrat whose response to something going wrong is to work harder rather than to solve the underlying problem.

There is the prime minister’s tragedy. Nothing to do with “polls and process”. It is a matter of a public service that was working well 14 years ago and now is not. Sunak had promised at the start of last year to get NHS waiting lists down, and they have continued to go up. He keeps trying to blame NHS staff for going on strike, but most voters think it is his job to settle the strikes and turn the NHS around.

A later caller was Olivia, a striking junior doctor in Newcastle, who pointed out that he hadn’t even definitively settled the dispute with the nurses. It was at this point that Sunak complained that he hadn’t been allowed to talk about migration

– another subject on which the overwhelming majority of the voters think he has failed.

A top politician needs two things to do a successful phone-in. One, convincing sympathy for voters who feel their lives are not going well. “I feel your pain,” Bill Clinton once said in a televised town hall meeting, showing other leaders how it is done. The other is a convincing plan for making people’s lives better. Rishi Sunak failed on both counts.

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Voices

Labour is guilty of fuzzy thinking on 'working people'

Aisles of smiles: Labour's Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves on a visit to Wiltshire yesterday (PA)

SEAN O'GRADY

Lately, I've been wondering whether I'm one of those that Rachel Reeves is referring to when she says "working people". That's because, as everyone surely knows by now, The Changed Labour Party – as they may as well rebrand themselves – is very much not going to increase taxes on working people.

So I guess if you're a wage slave, as I am, and receive no other income from any other source, then you're alright.

Interesting.

So that would, or should, mean that my council tax won't go up, or won't go up by more than general inflation, or by the cap councils have to work under. Yet council tax, obviously very much paid by working people, isn't one of the holy trinity of imposts – income tax, national insurance and VAT – explicitly stated by the shadow chancellor.

So what if you receive some modest dividends from your shares in BT? Or the interest on your building society account? Or capital gains on the sale of some shares? If you work for a living, does that mean you're going to be treated differently from, say, someone who's retired?

Reeves says people who've worked all their lives and saved up also count as "working people". So even though they don't go out to a job anymore, they too won't have to pay extra tax on income that isn't wages.

I think what Reeves has in mind is what we used to call "the idle rich", or Marx would term the "rentier class". People such as the non-doms, who she freely offers up as prime examples of people who aren't working people.

What we might call the "non-working classes" are surely going to get hammered in Starmer's Britain, but, aside from the super-rich non-doms with their peculiar status, who are these people?

Landlords, probably, living off the working families who rent their properties. But then again, what if they came from a poor background, and found themselves letting out a former home for fairly modest returns? The landed gentry aren't employed by anyone and they live off the fat of the land. But then again, running their huge estates and developing them could count as work.

What about the many millions of small business people who are self-employed and would, technically, fall into that category as well – capitalists who only take a "wage" from a company that

they in fact own. Presumably these energetic souls, when they come to retire and sell the company they own, shouldn't be paying capital gains tax on the proceeds?

The pledge not to raise taxes on working people cannot be converted into a clause in a finance bill. It's an unworkable answer to an important question

Does the notoriously lazy and now-loaded Boris Johnson count as a "working person"? Does Gary Lineker, as a freelancer rather than a direct employee of the BBC? He's pretty well-off, too, but, he works for his living. Does Rishi Sunak count, rich in his own right but also married to a billionaire's daughter?

Rupert Murdoch? He's plainly of retirement age and enjoying the fruits of his past tireless endeavours. Will Rupert pay more tax in his twilight years? How shall we categorise his nemesis, Hugh Grant, effortlessly playing a version of himself in every film he's made? Call that working for a living? Nigella Lawson? She works, even if she too makes it look like fun.

"Working people" is perhaps meant to mean "working classes", but we've not agreed for years about what that means. Or perhaps it's supposed to be people who are a step up the class ladder than those referenced in the Pulp song "Common People" – and who'd wanna live like them?

In fact, the only person I can think of that couldn't possibly fall into the Reeves dedication of "working people" is the Duke of York, the very definition of the idle rich. But, prosperous and well-connected as Prince Andrew is, he's not going to be able to single-handedly fund the "decade of renewal" we're promised.

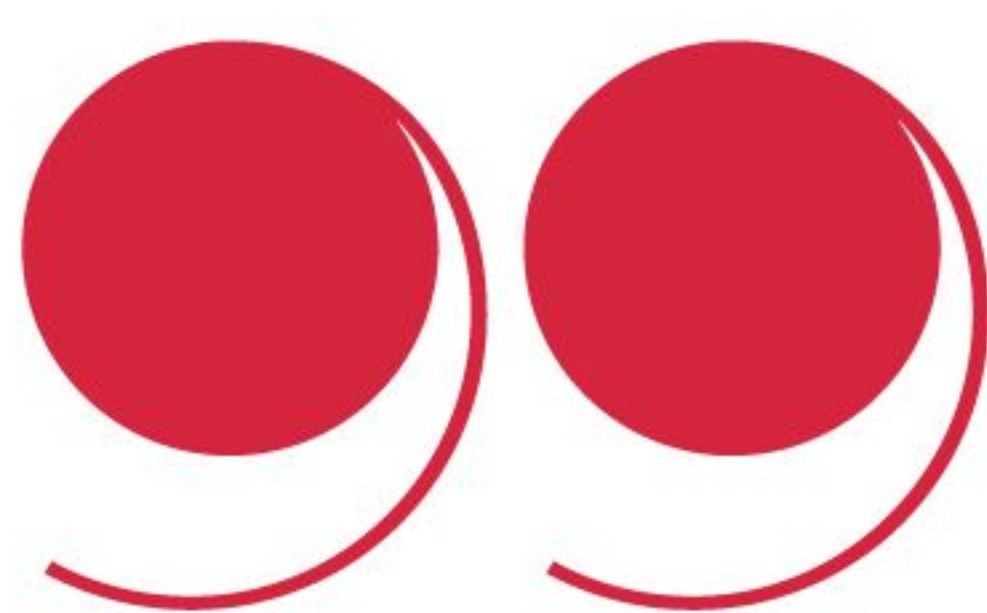
The point, I suppose, is that the pledge not to raise taxes on working people cannot be converted into a clause in a finance

bill. A tax lawyer would have enormous fun with it in a court, and it's an unworkable answer to an important question.

Raising tax rates on substantial rental income, dividends, and capital gains is fine, as long as you tell people that's what you're going to do. Taxing "unearned income" – arguably a misnomer – differently has been done by governments of all kinds for decades.

Labour also says, as a last line of defence, that nothing in the manifesto requires such increases. Again, fine; but what about things that cannot be foreseen in any manifesto – wars, pandemics, global slumps, or truly "black swan" events?

Reeves says she can't write five years of budgets in advance, which is fair, but by ruling things out with such ambiguous language that is exactly what she is doing.

You can't responsibly give everyone the impression their taxes cannot ever go up. One day some very disgruntled "working people" will remind the Labour government about the rash promises they made in 2024.

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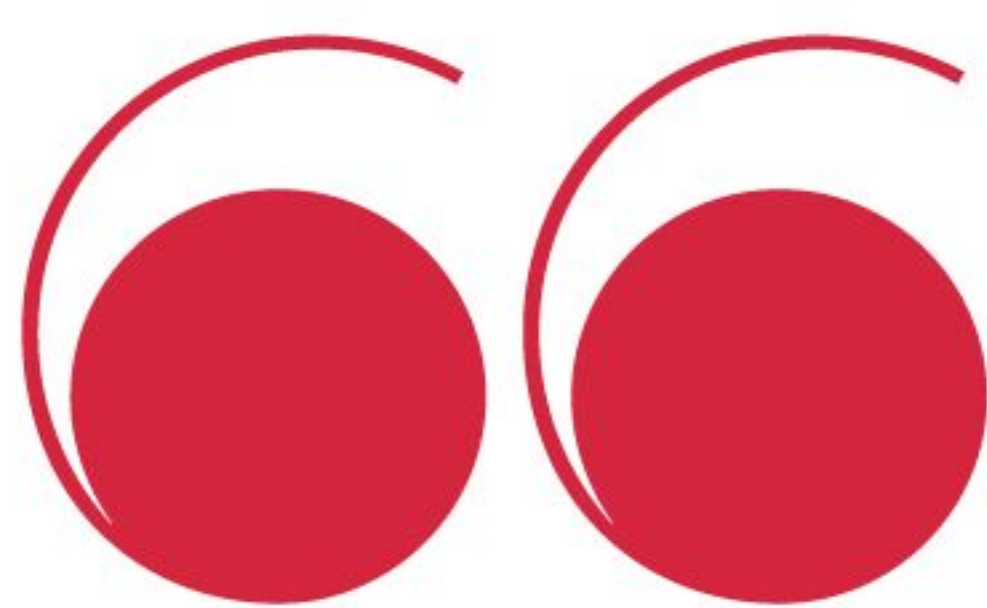
Voices

Scotland's Labour love-in could be a brief encounter

SNP leader John Swinney challenged Labour to tell voters: 'Where is the change?' (PA)

ANDREW GRICE

What a difference five years makes. At the 2019 election, the main issues in Scotland were Scottish independence and Brexit. Both suited the pro-Remain SNP, which won 48 seats to Labour's one.

This time, the overriding theme is how to oust the Conservatives at Westminster, which suits Labour very nicely

when it looks capable of doing that for the first time since the Tories came to power. The SNP's problem is that it looks largely irrelevant to the main question.

The top issue for Scots is the NHS, which is why SNP leader John Swinney proposed a £10bn-a-year boost to health spending in the manifesto he launched yesterday. But this was a demand on the next UK government, which holds the purse strings; only £1.6bn of the money would go to Scotland.

Swinney told voters considering Labour to be "careful what they wish for", because "voting Labour in Scotland will get you spending cuts". His challenge to Labour was "Where is the change?" when the party is committed to the two-child benefit limit, Tory fiscal rules that mean austerity, and remaining outside of the EU (which the SNP would rejoin). Fair questions with which plenty of Labour figures would privately agree.

Although independence has not featured much in the campaign, it is still on page one of the SNP manifesto. It says the Scottish government would be empowered to begin immediate negotiations with the UK government if the SNP wins a majority of Scottish seats.

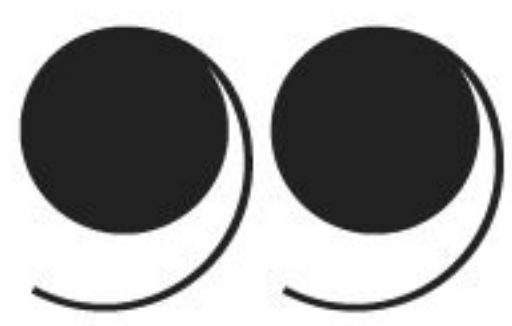
But it is unlikely to do so, and Swinney dodged questions on whether failure to win a majority of seats would be a vote for the union. If that happens, the SNP will likely argue the 2021 Scottish parliament elections are still a mandate for a second referendum.

Swinney admitted the SNP has had "a tough time" of late. Unusually, it meets some hostility on the doorsteps. "People are scunnered," one candidate reports. Some voters want to punish the SNP for the controversy which saw the once-infallible Nicola Sturgeon arrested and her husband Peter Murrell, the party's former chief executive, charged in connection with embezzlement of funds. Then there's Humza Yousaf's miserable year as first minister and the party's patchy record on public services during 17 years in power in Edinburgh.

The hope of independence masked the SNP's performance – but there has been no hiding place since the Supreme Court ruled

that the power to call a referendum lies with the UK government.

The momentum is with Labour, which has raised its target during the campaign to about 35 of the 57 Scottish seats. However, many seats are very tight, with one model suggesting 21 could be decided by five points or less.

Voters who 'lend' votes can take them back, as many of the 2019 Tory voters in the red wall in the north and Midlands will do on 4 July

Despite that, Labour senses a chance to settle old scores: in 1979, the SNP brought down the Labour government and helped keep it out of power until 1997. Then, the SNP ended Labour's dominance in Scotland by reducing it from 40 seats to one at the 2015 general election.

Anas Sarwar, the impressive Scottish Labour leader, has revitalised his party. He is part of the Starmer Project but has licence to distance himself from Keir Starmer on tricky issues such as the two-child limit and Gaza, on which the SNP attacks Labour.

Such criticisms do not seem to have dented Labour's appeal. "The SNP has gone from saying, 'There's no point in voting Labour because it can't win at Westminster' to saying, 'There's no point because it will win'," one senior Labour figure told me. Labour's "change" message offers much more clarity.

Although Labour is narrowly ahead of the SNP in recent Scottish polls, senior Labour figures admit privately there is little love for the party or Starmer. All parties agree Starmer is an issue on the doorsteps, and not in a positive way for his party.

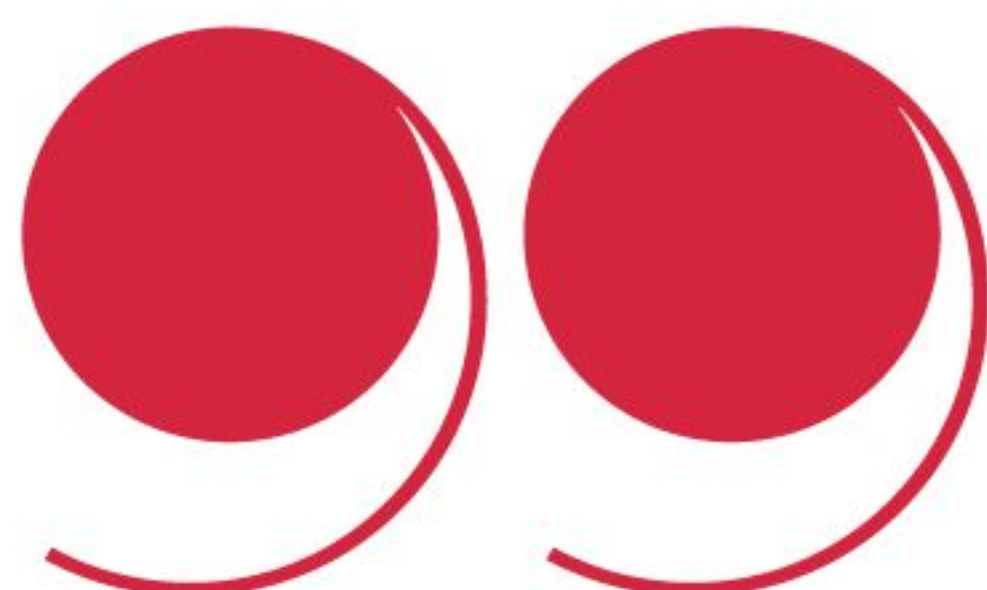
Labour's expected victory in Scotland might not signal a permanent shift. Some SNP supporters will "lend" Labour their

votes to “get the Tories out” – but Labour will have a much bigger battle on its hands to regain power at the 2026 Scottish parliament elections. Voters who “lend” votes can take them back, as many of the 2019 Tory voters in the red wall in the north and Midlands will do on 4 July.

Labour will take the win, then: it’s as desperate for a win in Scotland as the Scottish team is for one at the Euros.

However, a Labour victory would not mean the SNP’s dream of independence is dead. It’s just sleeping. A breakaway is seen as unrealistic in the short term, but this patient could easily revive to rude health. While the SNP’s ratings have slumped, the polls show Scotland is still split down the middle on leaving the UK.

Scots are not yet emotionally invested in Labour in the way they were in the SNP since the 2014 referendum; they will be looking for an early dividend from a Labour government. With money tight, that will be difficult. The SNP, and the goal of independence, could easily become a vehicle for Scots disappointed by the Labour government.

The affair between Scotland and Labour might prove a brief one.

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The tainted ghosts of Tory past can't help Sunak now

After 14 years of mismanagement, deceitful governance and obfuscation, Rishi Sunak compounds his party's disgrace by enlisting the assistance of David Cameron and Boris Johnson to gain much-needed votes Cameron gave us Brexit, and Johnson "got it done". Both former PMs are tainted with failure.

What on earth were the Conservatives thinking of when this plan was hatched? The inclusion of these two men in the election will undoubtedly push even more voters towards other parties.

The number of gaffes and mistakes the prime minister and his cohorts have made is eye-watering. Whoever is leading the election management for the Conservatives has done the other parties many favours.

Thank goodness Keir Starmer decided not to bring Tony Blair into the fight – that would have been a retrograde step for the Labour campaign. While there is nothing earth-shattering in the Labour manifesto, it contains solid, considered changes for a safer future. Keep going, Starmer!

Keith Poole *Basingstoke*

Tories vs Reform is a sideshow

In this election, the total number of Tory and Reform voters is unlikely to go up significantly. Right now, the parties – both of which are viewed as untrustworthy and the source of many of our problems – are busy fighting each other in a one-on-one battle that neither can win separately.

The return of Johnson will not help the Tories redeem themselves, and Nigel Farage's appeal appears to be a xenophobic populism. Their parties' squabble now provides something of a sideshow.

But both Johnson and Farage were major promoters of Brexit, possibly our greatest act of self-harm. The consequences of Covid mismanagement and corruption are painfully fresh in the minds of many. The run-down state of the NHS stands shoulder to shoulder with it.

Those actions are amply supplemented by the Truss-led Conservatives' especially damaging "special fiscal event", to the delight of the hedge fund managers who entertained Kwasi Kwarteng on the eve of that destruction with a "champagne reception". The rest of us will live with the consequences of that mugging for some considerable time.

Many more harmful failures of the past 14 years come to mind. It will be a relief when, as seems likely, the country is run by a government that values public service above exploitation.

This country could do without the right wing's brand of home entertainment.

David Nelmes *Newport*

National service is a nonsensical gimmick

Can anyone from the Tory party explain in detail the consequences of the government's so-called "flagship policy", which has already been described by military figures such as Lord West as utter nonsense?

Under a new mandatory national service scheme, every 18-year-old would have to sign up to serve their country – yet there will be only 30,000 places in the military, for more than 700,000 18-year-olds. Will those who have left school at 16 and managed to find employment have to give up work for a year? What about those hoping to start a university course? And why is the length of the military option just a meaningless 25 days?

It's clear this whole exercise is an ill-thought-out political stunt designed to appease old Tory voters who think a good dose of army discipline is what our young people need – when it is really nothing of the kind.

Geoff Forward *Stirling*

No place for Farage in a One Nation Tory party

The most frightening aspect of Farage's wish to take over or replace the Conservative Party is that he talks openly of wanting to create what he calls a new "centre-right" party.

Historically, the centre-right has been represented by One Nation Tories. Yet to Farage (and many of his sympathisers on the right), such policies and beliefs have now shifted to become distinctly "left wing".

Many have rightly described Farage's policies as "nasty, reckless and extreme" – and indeed they are. But cementing these policies as the centre-right of British politics would be a catastrophic and cataclysmic realignment. It would open the way for even further-right, and possibly even fascist, politics, marginalising those with hitherto centre-right, centrist or left-of-centre views.

Philip Nalpanis *Address supplied*

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My neighbour Lady Vic, the silent partner in Keir's life

The Starmers are my neighbours in Kentish Town, writes **Eleanor Mills**, and around these parts, we know she is very much her own woman and might not even move into No 10

Keir Starmer and Victoria in the Royal Box at the 2022 Wimbledon Championships (PA)

With only a fortnight to go before the election, local candidates' leaflets have been dropping through letterboxes across the country. And where I live in Kentish Town, northwest London, it has been no different. Apart from, maybe, that our local MP

Sir Keir Starmer could be the country's next prime minister and I can see his house from mine.

It has been quite lively round here recently; what with a noisy week-long protest at the station over the Gaza conflict and piles of children's shoes placed outside the Labour leader's house (to remind him of the thousands that have been killed). I regularly spot his security cavalcade if I am up early, whisking Sir Keir off to press the flesh on the campaign trail.

But what most surprised me when I saw the Labour leaflet was the picture of Sir Keir with his wife, Lady Starmer. Or Vic, as she is better known by the Kentish Town mum mafia (who reckon she is "cool", "a laugh", "down to earth" and "one of us").

Around these parts, with her jeans and silk shirts, leather jackets and chic "working mum" vibe, Vic blends in. Downtime for the Starmers means cooking and going to gigs and they are surrounded by great music venues from the Forum to the Jazz Cafe. It is a close-knit community and it's Vic's patch. She was born in London and grew up in Gospel Oak, not far from where the couple now have their £1.27m townhouse. In walking distance of the green spaces of Hampstead Heath and Regent's Park and within easy reach of Camden and Soho, it is a busy hub of just-like-them professionals.

As a political spouse, she has been keeping a "low pro" so far. Some say she is just concentrating on helping their son get through his GCSE exams, making him fried eggs and toast, while dutifully cracking on with her job as an occupational therapist in the NHS.

Of course, the incredibly smart, down-to-earth and funny Ms Starmer would undoubtedly help her husband on the doorstep, especially when my Labour contacts say voters still claim they "don't know who he really is". Vic has a political pedigree of her own, winning a landslide victory to become student union president at Cardiff University in 1994 when she challenged left-wingers in the NUS and won. The local paper proclaimed "Vic-tory" for the "windswept", deeply glam then Victoria Alexander.

She is certainly no shrinking violet, either. Tom Baldwin's biography of Keir Starmer recounts how the pair met when they were both lawyers. Keir (rumoured to then have been the inspiration for the character Mark Darcy in *Bridget Jones's Diary*) asked to speak to the person who had created some documents he needed for a case.

Rishi Sunak, Akshata Murty and the Starmers pictured on the day of May's local elections (Conservative Party/PA)

That phone call was to be his first introduction to Vic's feisty nature. Before Keir hung up he heard her say to a colleague: "Who the fuck does he think he is?" They met at a legal dinner a few weeks later "and she shared her vegetarian meal with him". Kentish Town legend has it that they had their first date at my local, The Lord Stanley (an excellent gastro pub if you were wondering). Afterwards, he walked her to the bus stop and waved her off. They married a few years later.

It was Vic who pushed him on in his career to become director of public prosecutions. In a recent Sky interview, the Labour leader said: "My wife was ringing adverts in the papers about well-paid lawyers' jobs and I said, 'No I want to serve my country', which is why, at a late stage, I came into politics…"

Asked if his wife was keen, Sir Keir replied: "No she wasn't at all, she thought it'd be far better to continue being a lawyer on a reasonable salary and not have all of the challenges you get as a politician."

If he won that battle, it remains to see who will win the war to get to No 10, while the path for wives to help their spouses on their way is well trodden. A two-for-one "Bogof" couples deal is often, depressingly, still what is expected – the D-Day celebrations being a case in point. There was Jill Biden, dutifully trailing behind Joe, and Brigitte doing her best to prop up the fortunes of the terminally unpopular husband Emmanuel. All shadows, of course, of super-spouse Michelle Obama whose power-coupling with husband Barack garnered its own moniker: Mobama.

So far, though, requests for interviews with Lady V from Starmer's team have been stonewalled. "Ms Starmer will not be giving any interviews" was the curt response when I tried. When I asked whether they might put up some trusted friends to speak for her (as happened when I once wrote a piece about Samantha Cameron, who also "wasn't available for interview" at the time), I was told firmly that that was not going to happen either.

> **There are rumours that she isn't keen on the idea of moving to Downing Street and would rather stay in Kentish Town, where both Starmer children attend local schools**

As one Labour grandee put it to me: "Keir is tough, strategic and proud. He doesn't want to use his family to humanise his rather robotic public image. He makes a lacklustre candidate but those qualities will make him a very good prime minister."

And so, until now, we have only had glimpses of Lady Starmer. She was there for the Euro 2020 final at Wembley Stadium, attended a candlelit vigil for Sarah Everard, and was spotted sporting dark glasses in the Royal Box for the Wimbledon women's singles semi-finals on Centre Court in 2022. Last year, she popped up in a £800 Edeline Lee dress for the Labour conference in Liverpool, which saw her compared to Julianne Moore. But all the signs are that she intends to be a modern wife, letting Sir Keir get on with it while she gets on with her working life.

They also have their two teenage children, aged 13 and 15, to think about. So far, the couple have managed to keep even their names out of the press and new privacy laws have helped. There are rumours that she isn't keen on the idea of moving to Downing Street and would rather stay in Kentish Town, where both Starmer children attend local schools (she became a governor at our local primary in 2015 when he became the local MP).

By his own admission, the effect his career is having on his children is a concern for Sir Keir: "I want this fight, the only thing which keeps me up at night is our children because they are 13 and 15.

"Those are difficult ages – it will impact them. We don't name them in public. We don't take photographs with them and they go to the local school.

"I am desperately trying to protect them in that way, but I know it is going to be hard and I do worry about that."

The couple at the Labour conference in Liverpool in October last year (AP)

I know a bit about how it might feel, having grown up with my stepmother, Tessa Jowell, who was a fixture in all of Tony Blair's cabinets. I was used to politicians coming and going in our family home. I've seen David Blunkett in his Speedos and Alastair Campbell playing the bagpipes. I've even experienced the paparazzi camped outside my house. As a family, you don't choose a career in politics but it impacts everyone's lives regardless. Just ask Cherie, who has never lived down answering the door the day after the election in her nightie and was once told that "everyone in the press office hated her".

I have met most of the incumbents of No 10 and their spouses (except for Mr Truss and Rishi Sunak and his wife). I had a particular soft spot for Samantha Cameron who always behaved with great charm, kindness and dignity, even during the death of her beloved son Ivan. Sarah Brown was a considerable businesswoman in her own right, an excellent PR woman and did much to soften Gordon Brown's harder edges.

Ironically, one of the most powerful pictures to emerge of his entire reign as leader was the shot of him with Sarah and their two little sons as they left Downing Street. I've even dined with Mr May, Theresa's soulmate and confidante – the two of them were thick as thieves, he being one of her key strategists.

Like Mr May, and Tony Blair's infamous domestic "kitchen cabinet", it is said that Lady Starmer is also an important voice in

Sir Keir's ear. It is to her that he turns when he has to make a tough call and Vic who is begged by aides to intervene if it really matters. Her insight into the true state of the NHS proved a good advantage during the leadership debates when Rishi tried to argue that waiting lists for treatments were coming down.

Keir and Victoria are keen to keep their children out of the spotlight (PA Wire)

Adding to their anxieties will be the current febrile climate around the Israel/Hamas conflict. Victoria's family are Jewish, fleeing Poland before the Second World War, and Sir Keir told the *Jewish Chronicle* they "observe some of the practices such as Friday night prayers". His wife attends the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St John's Wood. One Labour insider told me Vic had felt "intimidated and scared" by the pro-Palestinian protesters outside their home and she told a court this week how the experience had left her feeling "a bit sick" and "apprehensive and uncomfortable".

However, her absence from the campaign trail isn't, as some have claimed, because of a worry of alienating Muslim-origin voters. Vic has always been reluctant to be Keir's plus one. Sir Keir has chosen a political career – she, and most importantly, her family – have not. She is quite rightly, simply trying to tread a careful line between supporting her husband when necessary and protecting the privacy of their family.

But it will become more difficult for her to keep out of the public eye should her husband become prime minister. While it is

unlikely she will ever do an "Akshata" who took to the stage to deliver a "surprise" gushy speech dedicated to her husband Rishi's ambition, drive and love for Netflix shows, there will need to be a recalibrating of sorts.

Middle-class life in Kentish Town has much to recommend it; as does the anonymity of not standing out from the crowd. So far Lady Starmer, 51, has managed to do a fantastic job behind the scenes. As Sir Keir told LBC listeners this week, it was his wife who kept his morale up after a disappointing first debate. "I'm not good company when I'm in that place. Vic sort of cheered me up on that one…"

As 4 July hurtles towards us, I fear the Starmers' cosy Kentish Town vibe is about to change irrevocably. As a prime minister, with great power comes great responsibility and as a husband, Sir Keir will feel responsible to those closest to him, too.

"The biggest concern I have is about the impact it has on my family," he recently said. As a couple, I wish them the best of luck.

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Is a £140 taxi really my best option to get to Heathrow?

Rates for the Thistle are significantly lower than most off-airport hotels (PA)

Q I live in Cambridge and have a flight from London Heathrow Terminal 5 at 6.15am. I could wake up and 3am for a £140 taxi to Heathrow. I would prefer to travel by train the night before. But the Sofitel at Heathrow Terminal 5 costs £250. I could stay in an "off-airport" hotel for around £120 and get a taxi to Heathrow. Or I could just sit at Terminal 5 all night. None of these is great. Are there any other options?

Nick

A Yes. The optimal solution involves one of my very favourite hotels, the Thistle London Heathrow Terminal 5. I should stress the "Terminal 5" aspect should be taken with a pinch of salt: it is actually separated by the northern runway from the British Airways terminal. But its secret power is access to the Heathrow pods: a fleet of automatic driverless vehicles that shuttle between car parks and Terminal 5, on demand (no waiting for a bus) in under five minutes. They operate from 4am to 12.15am, which will work fine for your flight.

The Thistle is right next to the car parks and has a gate that takes you straight to the pods. You must pay £8 to go through the gate (though I have observed not everyone does).

Rates for the Thistle are significantly lower than most off-airport hotels, reflecting the fact that it is a 1970s structure that has seen better days. I normally pay around £80; for the average night in July, it's around £100; lower on Sundays, higher on Tuesdays. You will actually save on the journey from Cambridge to the hotel, too, because there is no need to travel via Heathrow and pay the high surcharge for using a train to the airport.

Instead, travel via the Elizabeth line to West Drayton (£33 from Cambridge). Going to the airport is a ridiculous £25 more. From West Drayton, bus 423 runs regularly and stops outside the hotel on Bath Road, Longford for a fare of £1.75. The total cost is about the same as the taxi – but less environmentally damaging and grants more sleep – for a 6.15am flight I would wake at 4.30am, with 10 minutes enough to allow for security at Terminal 5.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @SimonCalder

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ON THIS DAY

Nan Winton, here interviewing politician Barbara Castle, became the first woman to read the national news on BBC television, on this day in 1960 (Getty)

1756: Night of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Some 146 English prisoners were put into a cell measuring 18ft by 14ft on a hot June evening when the Nawab of Bengal captured Fort William. Only 23 survived the night.

1789: The seeds of the French Revolution were sown when a National Assembly was formed to oppose the domination of the aristocracy.

1819: Composer Jacques Offenbach – creator of *Tales of Hoffmann* and *Orpheus in the Underworld* – was born in Cologne. He lived and worked in France.

1837: William IV (the Sailor King) died at Windsor, and his niece Alexandrina Victoria, aged 18, came to the throne. When she was handed documents at her first privy council meeting, she instructed officials to delete Alexandrina and name her Queen Victoria.

1927: Greyhound racing began at London's White City Stadium.

1949: American tennis player "Gorgeous Gussie" Moran caused a sensation at Wimbledon by wearing lace-trimmed underwear under her short skirt, designed by Teddy Tinling.

1960: Nan Winton became the first woman to read the national news on BBC television.

1977: A pipeline carrying oil across Alaska was opened.

Birthdays

Wendy Craig, actor, 90; **Stephen Frears**, film director, 83; **Brian Wilson**, rock musician (The Beach Boys), 82; **Lionel Richie**, singer/songwriter, 75; **John Goodman**, actor, 72; **Vikram Seth**, novelist, 72; **Peter Reid**, former football player and pundit, 68; **Nicole Kidman**, actor, 57; **Frank Lampard**, former footballer and pundit, 46.

PA

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Why short shorts are riding high with men this summer

Olivia Petter says Paul Mescal et al should know better

The 'Normal People' actor has been dubbed the 'king' of short shorts (Getty)

There are always three indications that British summer has started. The first is that offices start pumping out so much air conditioning everyone catches a cold. The second is that people start finding an excuse to drink rose at noon. And the third is that men start wearing shorts.

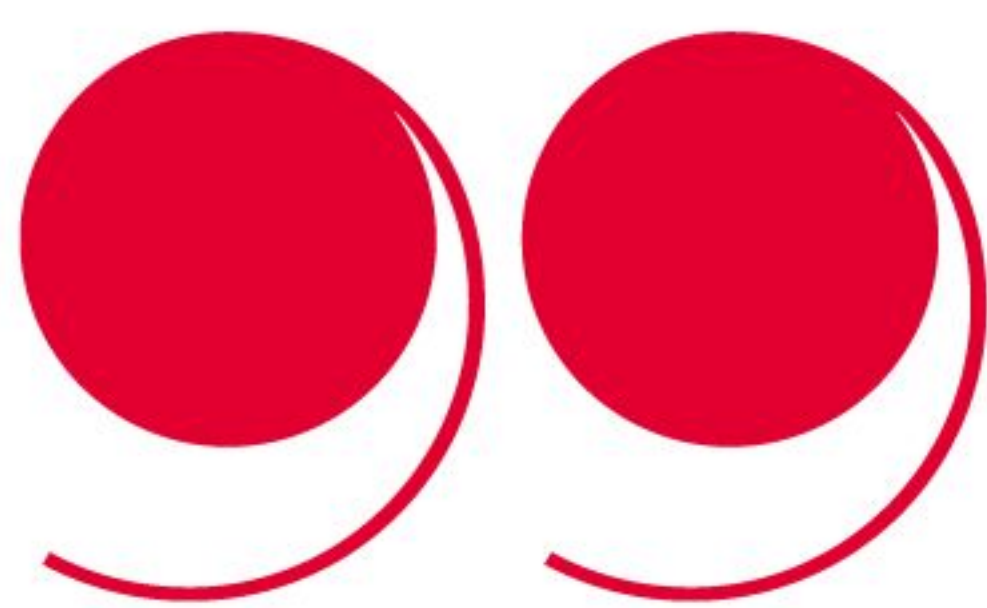
OK, summer hasn't started yet, and we have no idea if and when it will ever turn up. But we know that, for a while, all of the above has been the tried and tested seasonal format with little variation. At least until recently. Because for the last few years, those aforementioned shorts have been causing an increasing amount of alarm as they inch higher and higher up men's legs. That's right, I'm talking about short shorts. And this summer, or whenever warm weather does finally descend on the UK, expect short shorts to be back with a vengeance – and they'll be shorter than ever before.

Paul Mescal is to blame for this. Hailed as "the king of short shorts", the *Normal People* heartthrob has been making a case for baring one's thighs in the balmier months since 2020, when the then-24-year-old was photographed jogging in a pair of white Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) shorts from O'Neills that grazed several inches above his knees. The look quickly transitioned from PE-chic to the world of high fashion; months later, Mescal was photographed in those same shorts in *GQ*, though in this instance, they were paired with a £10,000 Hermès fleece. Other celebrities followed suit, with everyone from Harry Styles to Milo Ventimiglia doing their best to convince us all that it's time for a "thigh guy summer" in their respective short shorts offerings.

Since then, though, the aesthetic has evolved, and the shorts have continued to shrink beyond sense and sensibility. Consider Mescal's recent appearance at Gucci's Milan Fashion Week spring/summer 2025 show; the actor arrived in a light blue collared shirt, notably leaving the top and bottom two buttons undone, and a pair of white striped micro shorts. But the look didn't end there: the *All of Us Strangers* star finished it all off with a pair of Gucci Horsebit loafers and white sports socks.

"I'm a fan of the short inseam," Mescal told *GQ* at the event. "From my eye, it's to do with proportion; a shorter short with maybe a longer top. I'm a big advocate for men wearing shorter shorts." But how do you manage to do so without looking like Alan Partridge? With a flash of his stomach peeking out from above his shorts, and just the right amount of chest and leg on

display, Mescal managed to pull it all off. But this is concerning – because it's going to lead other men to think they can do the same. And reader, I assure you, most of them cannot.

> **Yes, Mescal makes it work but that's because he's hardly your everyday lad. He is an A-list celebrity**

Look, I understand that summer is a difficult time for men, sartorially speaking. There are only so many colourful short-sleeved shirts and denim shorts one can wear without looking like a dowdy maths teacher, or worse, an overgrown toddler who has raided the bargain bin in a seaside vintage shop. In fact, when it comes to fashion faux pas during the summer months, men are spoilt for choice. If it's not a patterned bucket hat making them look like a Hunter S Thompson wannabe, it's a Hawaiian shirt they'll insist several times is either ironic or retro. And if it's not a pair of socks and sandals they're passing off as "normcore", it's a waterproof jacket they're calling "gorpcore".

None of this is good. But all of it pales in comparison to the short shorts, particularly when paired with loafers and white socks, a look that many will now inevitably be trying to emulate. Yes, Mescal makes it work but that's because he's hardly your everyday lad. Not only is he an A-list celebrity, but he is also an indie darling who doesn't use Instagram, having long abandoned the social media platform after *Normal People* turned him into a walking target for literally anyone with access to a smartphone and the flame emoji. Even a secret account seems to have been

dumped since it became public – the strangely named @bigbreadpedlar is now a private account.

The point is that – unlike short shorts themselves – this all gives him some wiggle room when it comes to his wardrobe. Wiggle room that does not apply to, let's say, a 35-year-old accountant trying to find something to wear to his brother-in-law's BBQ on Sunday. Imagine the mockery. The self-made memes shared across WhatsApp groups: nationally at first, then possibly globally.

But don't worry, it's not like women aren't also haunted by an outlandish garment that simply doesn't work for mere mortals. We have our own hemlines to contend with – see the rising trouser-free trend that sees celebrities walking around in their knickers. Then there's the naked dress, a trend that has been relentlessly spamming our screens for several seasons now. Yes, a sheer dress looks gorgeous and avant-garde at, say, the Met Gala or on a red carpet at Cannes Film Festival. And given the lack of fabric, it's a sensible choice for a balmy day. But that doesn't mean you should start baring your nipples at the family picnic.

So, to men considering taking their style notes from Mescal this season: don't. Stick to regular-sized shorts or better yet, jeans. There's absolutely nothing wrong with jeans; it's much harder to make a bad outfit out of them. Plus, the sight of your upper thighs should really only be inflicted on your loved ones. Thank me later.

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COOK UP A STORM

From cast iron skillets to stainless steel stockpots, these pans can tackle almost every job on the stove, writes **Andy Lynes**

There is no one perfect induction pan or set of pans. The requirements in terms of number of pans, and their size, shape and weight will vary from household to household, and cook to cook, depending on the number of people being fed and the type of food being prepared.

But there are qualities that every pan should have. Ideally, the pan will have a perfectly flat base, so it achieves maximum

contact with the hob, to ensure even cooking and optimum energy efficiency. The base will be thick enough to ensure ingredients won't stick and burn and will react quickly when you increase or decrease the heat. It will be robustly constructed, so it will last a long time. and, if it says it's non-stick, surely nothing will stick to the surface.

Happily, our testing showed that there are lots of options at different price points that meet all of those requirements. However, the old saying that 'you get what you pay for' holds true with induction pans. In our experience, pans with higher price points, made from high-quality 18/10 stainless steel or enamelled cast iron, were generally more robustly constructed and likely to outlast lower-priced options.

We were very pleasantly surprised by the aluminium pans we tested, which had the advantage of being particularly lightweight, too (it's worth noting that not all aluminium pans work on induction hobs, and need either a magnetised base or a layer of iron in the base to work with the technology, so always check product details before you buy).

There is a continuing debate around non-stick pans and the presence of potentially harmful PFOA and PFAS chemicals in the coating, although it appears that the jury is still out on the matter. However, many brands are now proudly stating their pans are PFOA- and PFAS-free, so, it's worth doing some research before you buy. There is also competition between Teflon and ceramic coatings, as to which is the most effective and durable. Although our favourite non-stick pan in this review was ceramic coated, all of the non-stick pans we tested performed very well, so the choice may come down simply to personal preference.

How we tested

We cooked with all the pans several times, to see how well they performed in terms of even heat distribution, versatility (including if they were oven safe), ease, comfort of handling and, if applicable, how well its non-stick coating performed. We assessed them in terms of the robustness of their construction,

their weight and how easy they were to store (for the pan sets, we judged them on whether they were stackable or not). We also hand-washed every pan, to assess how easy they were to clean, as well as if they were dishwasher safe.

BEST BUY
INDY/BEST
INDEPENDENT

Stellar induction 28cm frying pan, non-stick £65, Stellar

This roomy pan became our first choice for so many different reasons during the testing process that we just had to pick it as our all-round favourite. Whether it was a Saturday morning fry-up with beautifully crispy bacon, nicely browned sausages and eggs that just slid off the pan, a mid-week meal of crispy-skinned chicken thighs, or a Friday night treat of perfectly cooked steaks, the Stellar did the job.

The 18/10 stainless steel construction, triple layered Teflon coating (free of potentially harmful PFOA chemicals) and thick 'hot forged' base delivered even heat and a premium feel beyond the price point. The silicon soft grip stay-cool handle felt good to hold and enabled safe transfer from hob to oven (the pan is safe up to 180C).At 7cm high, the pan has enough depth to make it suitable for paella or a ragu, too. The non-stick coating made the pan especially easy to clean by hand, but it can also go in the dishwasher. With a 10-year guarantee, we expect the Stellar to be our go-to pan for years to come.

Swan retro five-piece pan set: £72.99, Amazon

If you're looking for great value but don't want to sacrifice on style, this 1950s-inspired pan set fits the bill. With their retro ribbed design, the 16cm, 18cm and 20cm saucepans and 20cm and 28cm frying pans looked great and performed beyond their relatively low price point. The ceramic non-stick coating worked like a dream, too.

We particularly loved the 28cm frying pan, which produced beautifully crispy bacon and was the perfect size and shape for a family-sized chorizo frittata that just slid out of the pan onto the plate. We used the saucepans for everything from boiling potatoes (the tempered glass lids meant we could cover the pan to bring it up to temperature quickly, while keeping an eye on things to ensure it didn't boil over), to making a spicy tomato sauce and found that they heated quickly and evenly and were responsive to changes in temperature.

On the downside, the pans are not oven-proof or dishwasher-proof, although they were very easy to clean by hand. The pressed aluminium construction may not be quite as robust and durable as the other more expensive pans reviewed and the Bakelite handles, though nicely designed and comfortable to use, looked less than premium (we also found that we needed to

use a cloth to safely lift the lids as the lid handles became hot after a while). However, we thoroughly enjoyed cooking with the set that met our everyday cooking needs with ease.

Buy now

GreenPan Barcelona pro 18cm saucepan with lid: £72, Fenwick

The non-stick coating of this smart-looking pan is so smooth and effective that it should probably come with a hazard warning, at least for the ingredients that slip and slide over its mirror-like surface. Green Pan is rightfully proud of what it calls its "thermolon infinity professional ceramic non-stick coating", which is free from PFAS chemicals that are potentially harmful to the environment. It's also scratch-resistant and extremely easy to clean.

At 5mm thick, the aluminium and stainless-steel constructed pan felt pleasingly weighty and robust, yet easy to handle and heated up evenly and efficiently. The 2.1l pan and glass lid are oven-safe up to 200C, making the pan perfect for starting a stew on the hob and finishing off in the oven.

Buy now

Staub 25cm tomato cast iron cocotte: £239.95, Amazon

A pot in the shape of a giant cherry-red, beefsteak tomato might not sound like the most sensible addition to your kitchen, but hear us out. Yes, it's a head-turning piece of cookware that will look fabulous on your dinner table, but it's practical, too. The cast iron construction is not only hard-wearing and scratch-resistant, but can be heated to high temperatures, which allowed us to achieve a great sear on some lamb for a curry. Once the snug fitting lid was on (we loved the stalk-shaped handle) and the heat reduced, the cocotte retained an even all-round heat and sealed in the juices and aromas to produce a fantastic end result. We got even better results finishing a stew off in the oven (the cocotte is safe to use up to 260C) and the 2.5l capacity meant we could cook for a crowd.

Although the cocotte is dishwasher safe, it does take up a lot of room, so we preferred to hand wash it, and it took little effort to get it looking pristine again. The only downside is the cocotte is so enjoyable to use that you may only ever cook stews, casseroles and braises, but a lifetime of delicious, easy-to-prepare and economical dishes doesn't sound too bad to us.

Buy now

Smeg casserole pan: £64.98, Smeg

Bring some Italian style into your kitchen, with this eye-catching Art Deco-ish retro casserole. But it's not just about the good looks, this is a high-quality and useful piece of kitchen kit. Constructed from aluminium, the casserole feels light, but the multi-layered thickened base ensures fast and even heat distribution. The non-stick coating worked a treat and we hardly needed to add any oil when browning meat.

Heat resistant up to 250C, the casserole is perfect for its traditional use of slow-cooked stews and braises that you can start on the hob and finish in the oven (the easy-to-grip double handles make transferring the pan safe and simple). But the rounded bowl design and roomy 4.6l capacity made it ideal for stir-frying, too, and we'd happily cook a risotto in it or use it to boil or blanch vegetables.

We loved the tempered glass lid, so we could keep an eye on the food while it was cooking, as well as how easy the whole thing was to clean; the pan is dishwasher safe but was no chore to hand wash. We also tried the 26cm/ 7.7l version, which was more pan than we needed, but it would suit a large family that needs to cook up big pots of pasta or vegetables on the regular. Although the pan is relatively expensive, it's both covetable and practical, so well worth the investment.

Buy now

Kuhn Rikon allround five-piece set: £284, Kuhn Rikon

If you're looking for a high-quality pan set to cover all your everyday cooking needs, look no further. With 16cm/1.5l, 18cm/2.3l and 20cm/3l saucepans available with glass lids; a 24cm non-stick frying pan and a 16cm/1.5l non-stick milk pan, you're all set to boil some veg or rice, heat up a tin of beans, cook chilli, and fry sausages among dozens of other jobs.

Made from durable and rust-resistant 18/10 stainless steel with thick encapsulated bases that ensure even heat distribution, the pans look and feel premium. Design aspects such as each pan's curved, stay-cool ergonomic handles that are easy to grip; accompanied by snug fitting vented glass lids that allowed for monitoring of the cooking process, and the rounded edge that aided the pouring of a sauce or draining liquid all added to the pleasure of cooking. Oven safe up to 240C, dishwasher safe and stackable for ease of storage, this set is an asset to any family kitchen.

Buy now

Saveur Selects voyage series tri-ply chef's pan with insulated lid, 21cm: £100, Buy Me Once

The more we cooked with this versatile pan, the more we loved its thoughtful design. The curved bottom not only looked great but also meant there were no corners to navigate with a spoon or spatula when moving ingredients around the pan. Its flared rim made pouring soup into a bowl or draining water from boiled vegetables easy, and also aided evaporation, making the pan perfect for reducing sauces. Conversely, the double-walled lid was extremely efficient at trapping moisture so that the pan came to a boil quickly and both the flavours and aromas of slow-simmered dishes were kept in the food; this was aided by a series of condensation drip rings in the underside of the lid that distributed the condensation evenly.

The high-quality 18/10 stainless steel with aluminium core construction (oven-safe up to 260C) ensured fast and even heat distribution and made everything from cooking risotto to sauteing spinach and boiling up spuds a joy. We loved the rivet-less construction and couldn't imagine the textured, stay-cool handle coming loose any time soon. Although the pan is dishwasher safe, we followed the manufacturer's recommendation and washed it carefully by hand, getting an as-new result each time with little effort.

We only had two slight criticisms. Firstly, the solid lid meant we were cooking 'blind' when it was in place and needed to pay close attention to ensure the pan didn't boil over; a glass lid would have been our first choice. Secondly, we noticed that the stay-cool handles did begin to warm up after a few minutes of cooking time, although we were still able to handle them with our bare hands. However, the pan's use and care instructions include a caution saying "your cookware, handles and lid will be hot during and after use. Always use a dry towel when lifting or removing your cookware," so it may be sensible to err on the side of caution. Nevertheless, we can easily see this becoming a firm kitchen favourite.

Buy now

Zwilling simplify five-piece stainless steel pot set, silver: £230.61, Amazon

If you're a busy home cook who always has something simmering on the stove, look no further than this high-quality pot set that has you covered for every eventuality. The 24cm/6l stock pot is ideal for stock making of course, but also for cooking pasta or boiling up a big batch of potatoes to be roasted for Sunday lunch. At the other extreme, the 16cm/1.5l saucepan was perfect for hard-boiled eggs. The three medium-sized pots,

billed as two ‘stock pots’ at 16cm/2l and 20cm/3.5l, and one ‘stew pot’ coming in at 20cm/3l (no, we’re not sure what the difference is, either) came in handy for everything from soup making to heating up noodles.

The high-quality 18/10 stainless steel construction was surprisingly light and gave the pans a premium feel. The multi-layered sandwich base with an aluminium core did a great job of heating quickly and evenly and retaining the heat, meaning we used a lower heat setting. The mirror finish means it’s easy to see what’s going on inside the pan. The stay cool, soft-touch silicone handles were nice to use, felt secure and aided grip. The off-set wing-like lid handles not only looked stylish and unique, but also meant the lid could be slotted into one of the handles during cooking, thereby avoiding having to place it on the countertop.

The silicone-edged lids fitted snugly, which helped things come up to boil quickly and the integrated sieve was effective, obviating the need for a colander – though, the pan was a little on the slow side to drain. The pots are oven-safe up to 180C, and therefore ideal for braised dishes. They’re also dishwasher safe but were quick and easy enough to clean by hand. The only downside was that not all the pans stack inside each other, and we ended up with two separate stacks, which may be an issue if cupboard space is at a premium in your kitchen.

Our Place always pan: £130, Our Place

The makers claim this stylish pan will replace “eight pieces of traditional cookware”. That’s a bit of a stretch, as the always pan is basically a high-sided frying pan with lid and steamer basket insert. But it’s true that it’s versatile, handling various cooking methods demanded by a Spanish-style pork and butter bean stew with ease. The non-toxic, non-stick enamel coating is so effective, we only needed a teaspoon of oil to fry some diced pork belly to a good sear, with the pan heating up quickly and evenly. Lowering the heat, onions, chillies and peppers sweated nicely with some paprika, without sticking. The 2.46l capacity meant we could just add in the tomatoes, stock and butter beans and let it simmer away with the well-fitting lid effectively sealing in all the aromas and juices.

It does have its limitations, however. While the aluminium construction makes the pan light (1.36kg) and easy to handle, it does mean it’s best used over low to medium heat, to protect the non-stick coating. Although the manufacturers say “the occasional sear is totally fine” this won’t necessarily be your go-to pan for steaks and chops. It’s not oven-proof, either, which means braised dishes will have to be cooked on the hob and you will have to hand wash your always pan, as it’s not dishwasher safe, but it took very little elbow grease to get it clean.

However, we loved the matte finish, and the fact it was available in a range of nine distinctive colours. The supplied wooden spatula can also be rested on the pan's sturdy and comfortable stay-cool handle, eliminating the need for a separate spoon rest. It may be a little on the expensive side, but the always pan is as much a pleasure to cook with as it is to look at, and would be a welcome and useful addition to any keen cook's collection.

Zyliss cook ultimate non-stick three-piece set: £74.38, Amazon

If you're looking to cut down the amount of oil and fat you cook with, this set of rugged, hard-wearing pans is the perfect solution. The unusual ball-blasted interior has a rough and uneven three-layer coating, which the manufacturers claim allows fats to accumulate away from the food, for a healthier result. Although running a cooking utensil over the cratered surface felt strange at first (the coating is so robust you can even use metal utensils), we soon got used to the sensation.

We only needed a tiny drop of oil to sweat some chopped onions, which cooked quickly and evenly in the heavy aluminium-based pan. The silicon-coated ergonomic handles were extremely comfortable to use and the pans felt so solidly constructed that we could imagine them outlasting their 10-year

guarantee. Add in a securely fitting glass lid and the fact the pans are both oven- and dishwasher-safe and you have a lot of bang for your buck.

Buy now

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‘It makes me happy to see guys out there in lipstick’

For a few years in the Noughties, CSS were the electro-pop act on everyone’s lips. They chat with **Mark Beaumont** about their tour, indie sleaze, and being scared of Courtney Love

‘We’re a 100 per cent queer band and we’re all women’ (Gleeson Paulino)

They may not have been the hardest partying band of Noughties new rave, but CSS proved the hardest to party with. Paris Hilton had tried to lure the Brazilian electropop crew away to an exclusive post-Coachella A-list bash in 2007 – after all, their set had included Kraut-rave track “Meeting Paris Hilton” – but they

didn't show. Another time, Lindsay Lohan got an equally cold shoulder. And as for Courtney Love, the Hole frontwoman wasn't able to persuade exuberant singer Lovefoxxx to go up west with her to load up on the best Egyptian gear known to man.

"She invited us to go with her to Liberty to buy bedsheets," says Lovefoxxx – aka Luisa Matsushita, the visual whirlwind famed for sashaying through sauce-tronic tracks like "Let's Make Love and Listen to Death from Above" in rainbow sequin bodysuits. These days, you're more likely to find Lovefoxxx, now 40, in a painter's smock. "I was so intimidated that I would drink a lot just to be able to respond to the email. I was like, 'Oh my God, if I go to Liberty [with Love], I'm gonna die.' I chickened out."

When the six-piece CSS (short for Cansei de Ser Sexy or "tired of being sexy") landed from Sao Paulo like a glitter bomb dropped into the middle of Britain's thriving alt-rock maelstrom in 2006, Lovefoxxx was immediately adopted as the queen of the new rave microgenre, one half of the scene's definitive power couple alongside "super cool sweetheart" Simon Taylor-Davis. Yet, while the glow sticks, garish exercise attire and neon face paint whirled wildly around them, their focus, she explains now, was always on their shows – which clocked up to 300 a year at their peak, earning CSS a plaque for Hardest Working Band in Music from their agent. So energetic were the shows that the band were always too exhausted to rave on afterwards.

"We were very flattered with those invitations," Lovefoxxx says, sitting beside bandmate Ana Rezende on a Zoom call from Los Angeles, where her three forty-something bandmates are now based (she's still a resident of Sao Paulo). "But we were so tired, and we weren't going to do drugs just to go to a party, then have no voice the next day for the show. We were very professional and very adult about it."

When Lovefoxxx looks back at pictures of the chaos now, all she sees are drug-addled infants. "The people look so young, they look like they're 12," she laughs. "It was a scene made by babies. Some of those babies were on drugs. But we never…" She

pauses. “We were highly drunk. That was how we damaged our bodies – with alcohol.”

Different strokes: CSS frontwoman Lovefoxxx is more of a painter than a pop queen nowadays (Gleeson Paulino)

All this is partly why, of all the Noughties indie sleaze reunions underway, CSS’s is the most cautious. For a few years in the late-Aughts, they were the electropoppers du jour, hitting international charts, festivals, and Apple ad campaigns with tracks such as “Let’s Make Love…”, “Music Is My Hot Hot Sex”, “Alala” and “Off the Hook”. With new rave’s last train to the Interzone swiftly departing though, the hype surrounding CSS cooled – and what they now call “bumpy, challenging and unpleasant” inter-band relations saw the acrimonious departure of songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Adriano Cintra in 2011. The party soured; they released their fourth album *Planta* in 2013 and stopped touring the following year.

In 2019, CSS’s core four – Lovefoxxx, Rezende and guitarist/drummers Luiza Sá and Carolina Parra – were lured out of hiatus to play one show in Brazil, but the pandemic scuppered any enthusiasm for working on new material. Hence why they’re now marking their 20th anniversary solely with live dates, including a recent US tour and, starting this week, their first jaunt across the UK in a decade.

The pair insist it isn’t a “proper” reunion, though, reluctant as they are to give up the individual lives they’ve built for themselves since disbanding in 2014. “It’s very hard to live off of

a band when you're not Coldplay, obviously," Rezende explains. "The whole band thing that happened to us was very accidental. We had a really great 10 years, our whole twenties, and then we got to 30 and it's just a hard life. We all felt, in different ways, 'Oh, let's explore other things and do other things while we're still young.'" The appeal of playing again was purely to relive the early joys of hanging out in a van together talking nonsense. "It was very cool to have CSS come back, as in the beginning, as a fun thing to do," Rezende says. "But I don't think that CSS will ever become the centre of our lives again."

"I hope it doesn't," Lovefoxxx adds. "We do love making demos and being creative in our own circle but the whole promoting side of it is very tiring, especially now. We don't want to have that kind of lifestyle with social media. We're not *savvy*. This is a game for the people who are 20 years behind us. You do it, we did it already. Let's enjoy our lives another way." That said, she continues, "this band taught me everything I know about everything…" She suddenly becomes emotional, wiping away tears. "I travelled so much, and I was able to see cultures, try foods, and experience life and really find myself in a way that I would never be able to do if it wasn't for this band. This band is something huge but I'm glad that now it's just something we're doing for fun because it's not for the money, I assure you."

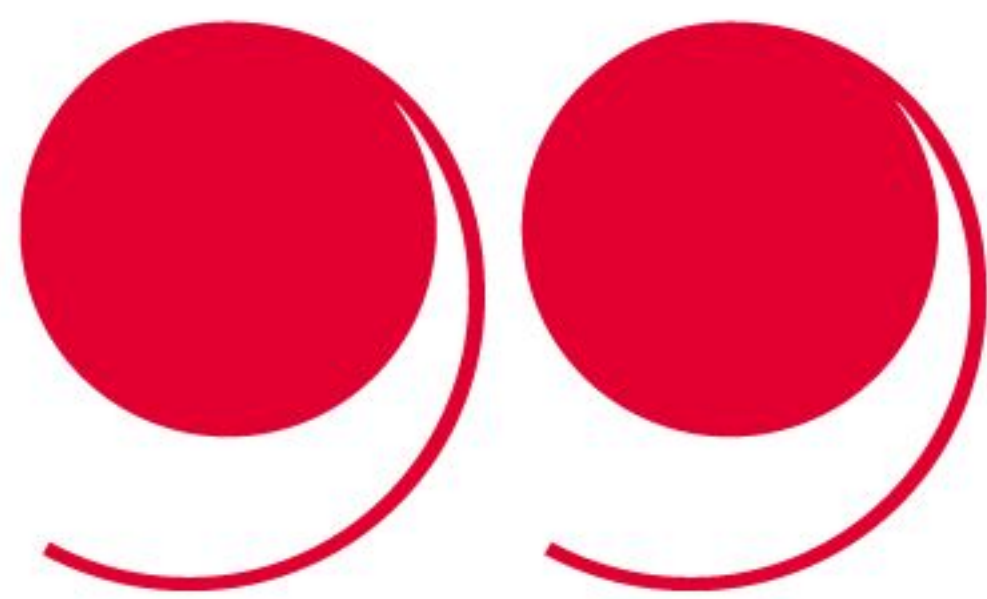
The Brazilian band were known for their live energy (Gleeson Paulino)

The separation between band and life is most important for Lovefoxxx. It was her compulsion to paint that brought on the band's 2014 hiatus in the first place. "It was something that was very closeted inside of me," she says. "I would start crying. I needed to paint. I don't even consider myself a singer; I'm a visual artist. I came to the girls, and I was like, 'I need to paint and I don't know how much time I need.'"

Tired of touring and increasingly eco-minded, she sold all her possessions to live off-grid on a plot of land that she bought in the Brazilian countryside and studied at the Earthship Biotecture Academy in Taos, New Mexico, where she learnt to build "crazy-looking" ecological houses. Then she volunteered on Earthship projects in Argentina and bio-construction schemes elsewhere, before cashing in her CSS-accrued air miles and flying to Australia to study permaculture. Meanwhile, in LA, Rezende began working in TV and advert production; Sá fell into sound mixing for films; and Parr became a tennis coach.

Now back on-grid in Sao Paulo, Lovefoxxx has bloomed as an artist. Having previously worked on exhibitions of ceramic jaguars in San Francisco, she's now represented by a Sao Paulo gallery where she sold every one of the striking abstracts displayed at her first show, and has a waiting list for further work. "Painting is my whole life right now," she beams, but it's fair to say she's no new rave Ringo. "It helps that she's really good," says Rezende proudly. "The paintings are really amazing. It's nice to have a friend who creates these things, and you actually love it."

Naturally, the demos that CSS briefly worked on around 2019 had more of an ecological bent than a hedonistic one. "We have songs talking about petroleum and plastic," Lovefoxxx says. "We have songs talking about beauty standards and domestic rescue cats, talking about losing faith in man, as in the species of humanity. But in a CSS way."

> **People would dress ugly and not care too much about it. It was very DIY, like stuff that you buy at the stationery store, it was more creative**
>
> *Lovefoxxx on the indie sleaze era*

Her spell off-grid gave Lovefoxxx a belated perspective on her time as a sci-fi pop princess. “I could really process CSS, the whole trajectory, what it was,” she says. “You don’t understand too much when you’re in the middle of it… We played a sold-out Brixton Academy show and in my mind that was like ‘OK, so for the next album we’re going to play two nights at the Brixton Academy’. I thought you’d always go up and up and up.”

“The trajectory was so fast upwards that it felt like, ‘oh, that’s what happens to bands’,” says Rezende. “We thought we were living a normal band life.”

CSS look back on indie sleaze (“the best name this era has ever had,” Lovefoxxx enthuses, “it embraces the whole thing”) as perhaps the last turned on, tuned in DIY idyll. “There’s something great about it having been the last few years of people not being obsessively online,” says Rezende. “It was more a live-in-the-moment situation. That was the last time.”

Lovefoxxx similarly recalls a more carefree attitude to fashion, music, and self-expression. “People would dress ugly and not care too much about it,” she says. “It was very DIY, like stuff that you buy at the stationery store, it was more creative. That changed in the 2010s with the It Girl blog culture. People wanted to look better, to be more attractive.”

CSS are still very DIY, albeit in a different way: Rezende does the tour admin, Parr the technical stuff, Lovefoxxx the posters and artworks. They are, though, very aware of the unpredictability and fragility of pop success. Which made it all the more wondrous when their recent run of US shows were greeted like the mother of all Trump conviction parties.

Don't call it a comeback: the band say a full-blown reunion is not on the cards (Gleeson Paulino)

"All the shows were packed, and everyone was really into it," says Lovefoxxx. "We felt very welcomed, accepted, and celebrated. I feel like I know how Janet Jackson felt when she got pregnant around 50 years old or something. Because it feels like a surprise pregnancy – if I were a person that wanted to be pregnant."

It’s a more CSS sort of landscape that they’ve returned to, as well. “The environment is much better for women now and LGBTQI+ people, which is so great,” says Lovefoxxx. “It makes me so happy to see all the guys with lipstick and everybody looking crazy weird. I love all the weirdos out there.”

“We’re a 100 per cent queer band and we’re all women,” Rezende adds. “Back when we were touring, it was sort of just us. Nowadays you see boygenius and you see Billie Eilish… there’s so much gay stuff there and women doing gay stuff.” Lovefoxxx giggles. “A gay protagonism. It makes me feel proud to be a human at this moment.” The CSS effect coming to fruition, I ask? Lovefoxxx swells with pride. “We’ve inspired so many queer people around the world. I know that because they talk to me, and we cry together, and they tell us how we helped them to recognise themselves. But we stand on the shoulders of L7, of Bikini Kill, Le Tigre, Bratmobile, Elastica. So many great women and queer artists have paved the way for us [but] I’m so proud to be part of it.” Call Paris Hilton: the party’s back on.

CSS’s UK tour begins in Glasgow on Saturday

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Inflation has fallen – but it's not quite as simple as that

The drop is good news for household bills. Just don't bank on getting a cheaper mortgage for a while yet, says **James Moore**

Basket-case economics: the average shopping bill is still well up on 2022 (Getty)

For the first time in almost three years, the Bank of England's holy grail has been found: inflation for the year to May fell back to its hallowed 2 per cent target, from 2.3 per cent in April. Food prices, which have long been a black spot, did a lot of the heavy

lifting to deflate the figure, having increased by just 1.7 per cent in the year to May compared with 2.9 in the year to April. This was cited as a key contributor by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

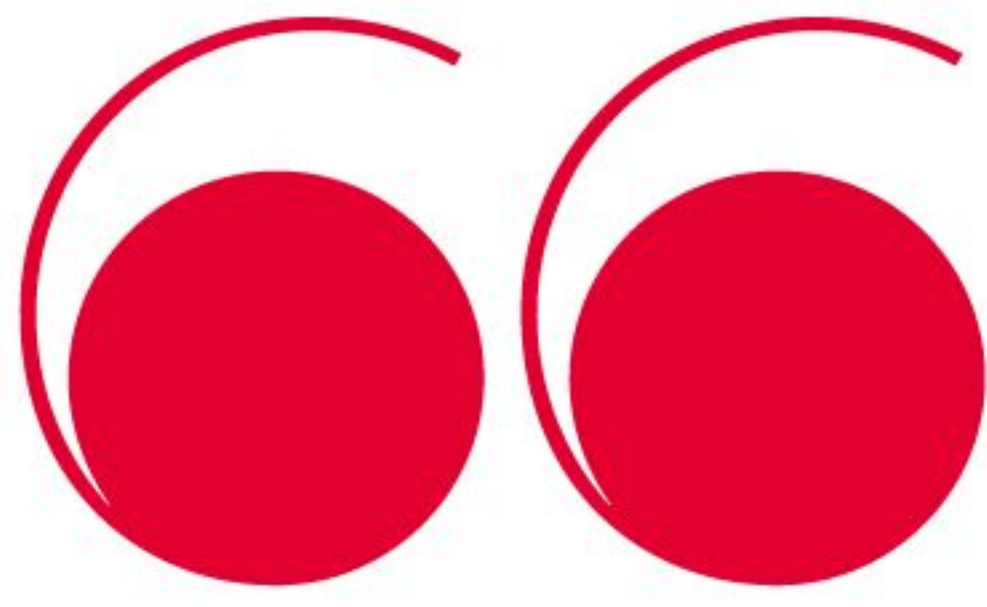
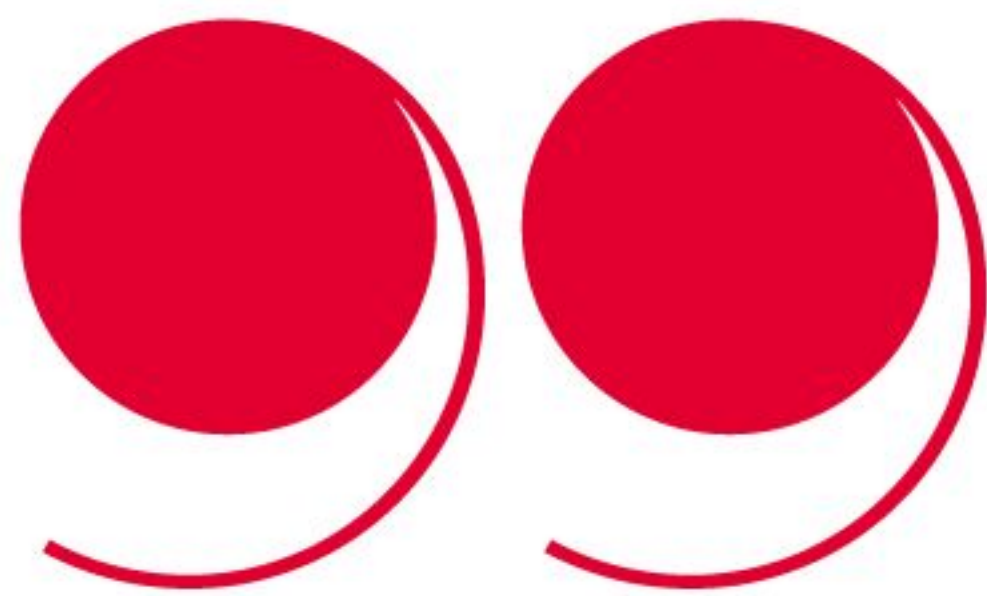
But although the government will be rejoicing at having been granted a decent “retail offer” while out election campaigning on the nation’s doorsteps, we shouldn’t get ahead of ourselves. The price of a weekly shop is still up compared with a year earlier, and the damage from the peak of more than 19 per cent recorded last year is still in the figures. The average shopping bill is more than 25 per cent higher than it was at the beginning of 2022.

However, Capital Economics notes that food-producer price inflation stood at just 0.2 per cent in May. “Food-price inflation will probably soon fall to zero,” said the forecaster. Bring it on.

In total, eight of the ONS divisions contributed to the downward move, with the recreation and culture sector and furniture and household goods joining food as the stars of the show, offset by two risers; transport was the biggest nasty. Feeling any richer yet?

The CPI (Consumer Prices Index) all-goods index – based on all of the things we buy – actually fell by 1.3 per cent, compared with April’s 0.8 per cent decline. This is the sharpest fall in the price of goods for nearly eight years.

Taken together, this data is encouraging. Household budgets were badly strained by the recent inflationary spike – the headline rate peaked at just over 11 per cent in 2022 – and they are still under pressure. But it is easing. The UK’s inflation is now the second lowest in the G7 group of advanced economies, bettered only by that of Italy.

This brings us on to the thorny question of what it all means for interest rates and, crucially, mortgage payments. There, the news is not so cheery. As much as the inflation figures will be welcome news for the beleaguered Rishi Sunak, he is most unlikely to get much help from the Bank of England when it announces its base rate today.

> **Markets place the chances of a cut in August at around 50 per cent. While this latest release was undoubtedly positive, the forecasts suggest that inflation will nudge up again later in the year**

Core inflation – which strips out the most volatile contributors, including food, fuel and tobacco – came in at 3.5 per cent in the year to May 2024, a chunky fall from 3.9 per cent in the year to April, and well below its high of 7.1 per cent. That was in line with City forecasts, as was the fall in the headline rate. But the fact that this measure of the underlying pressures in the UK economy is still elevated is something to which the Bank of England will pay close attention.

The real monster under the bed, however, was the performance of the all-services index, which rose by 5.7 per cent – only a small improvement over the April figure of 5.9 per cent and a disappointment when set against the consensus City forecast, which called for a rise of 5.5 per cent. The services sector makes up by far the biggest part of the UK economy (80 per cent), and the price of services is very closely linked to the size of wage settlements. The recent labour-market release from the ONS showed pay increasing at a 5.9 per cent clip.

The Bank's rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has repeatedly voiced its concerns about this. With the UK in the midst of an election, the MPC is under purdah, so we don't know what it thinks about the recent data releases. However, in part because of the election, and based on past statements

concerning wages and services, I think it is all but guaranteed that there will be no change to the current base rate of 5.25 per cent.

One thing to watch is how the vote goes. I expect the MPC's leading dove, external member Swati Dhingra, to vote for a cut. She has consistently called for an early reduction. Interestingly, last time she was joined by Dave Ramsden, the Bank's deputy governor for markets and banking. The five-strong internal Bank of England team on the committee has tended to vote as a bloc. How Ramsden votes this time may give us some hint about the future pathway for rates.

That is key when considering what this means for mortgage rates. Most people are on fixed-rate deals, and these are priced on the basis of the expected future pathway for rates, expressed through the interest rates swaps market. The pound strengthened on the news, which tells us that the City isn't optimistic about an early cut. Any move would help borrowers with mortgages linked to base rates, and would at least improve market sentiment, which might help those looking for fixed deals.

Markets currently place the chances of a cut in August at around 50 per cent. While this latest release was undoubtedly positive, the forecasts suggest that inflation will nudge up again later in the year. I think we'll have to wait for September at the earliest for that much-anticipated cut.

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Business

Business news in brief

Spoils of Warhammer: Games Workshop will hand out £18m in staff bonuses (PA)

Model employer! Games Workshop rewards staff

Games Workshop has revealed it dished out £18m among its staff after the Warhammer figurine maker reported a stronger year of sales and profits. The Nottingham-based company said it handed out cash payments "on an equal basis to each member of staff" in recognition of their contribution to its financial performance. The business has more than 1,500 staff at its global

headquarters in the UK, as well as workers based in offices and stores around the world.

Games Workshop said it estimates its pre-tax profit for the year to June to be at least £200m, up from £171m the year prior. The company sells figurines and miniatures online and in shops across the UK for the hobby Warhammer, a wargame usually played in groups. *PA*

Nvidia world's most valuable firm amid AI boom

Chipmaker Nvidia has overtaken Microsoft to become the world's most valuable company. It coincides with a huge surge in demand for computer chips from companies developing artificial intelligence systems. Nvidia grabbed the top spot on Wall Street from Microsoft, which has been trading the crown back and forth with Apple after they wrested it from past titans such as ExxonMobil and cigarette maker Philip Morris.

Nvidia's revenue routinely triples every quarter, and its profits are rocketing at even more breathtaking rates. Over the last five years, Nvidia's share price has increased thirtyfold, taking its overall market cap above $3.3 trillion. The top five most valuable companies in the world are now all based in either Silicon Valley or Washington state.

Telegraph reveals £278m loan hit from Barclay family

The Daily Telegraph has warned that a £278m loan withdrawn by its billionaire owners, the Barclay family, is unlikely ever to be repaid. In its annual accounts, the media company said the loan had pushed it to a £244.6m loss for the 2023 calendar year. That is despite the news group growing its turnover by 5 per cent year on year to £268m, helped by a sharp uplift in digital subscriptions and advertising income.

Telegraph Media Group, which also owns *The Spectator* and the Chelsea Magazine Company, has been gripped by an ownership crisis since last year. The £278m hit revealed yesterday is part of a loan extracted by the Barclay family, which is understood to

have been deemed unrecoverable; the accounts said a "detailed review" of historic transactions between TMG and "related parties" found "potential irregularities in the recording of such transactions". *PA*

Young's eyes Euro 2024 boost as summer sales grow

Pub group Young's has said it expects to be boosted by sports events over the summer after a jump in sales. The boss of the London-based company said it saw a surge in sales during the first England Euro 2024 match and has seen strong bookings for future fixtures. Young's, which runs more than 230 pubs, is among pub firms to highlight "positive" trading despite continued pressure on consumer budgets amid higher mortgage rates and rents.

Simon Dodds, chief executive, said: "We've got around £1m worth pre-booked for the upcoming games and have lots more sport coming in the summer, with rugby and the Olympics." Young's reported revenues grew by 5.4 per cent to £388.8m for the year to April, but saw its statutory pre-tax profit slip by 42 per cent to £20.7m, largely due to transaction costs linked to its £158m takeover of City Pub Group. *PA*

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Scotland raise their game to keep Euro dreams alive

Scotland McTominay (13)	1
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Brilliant Billy Gilmour skips away from Switzerland's Ricardo Rodriguez last night (AP)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD
AT THE COLOGNE STADIUM

The party goes on, just, as Scotland restore some pride and give themselves a real chance of reaching the knockout stages of Euro 2024 thanks to this battling draw against Switzerland. After the no-show of Munich, Scotland turned up in Cologne when their campaign was on the line. A defeat would have seen Steve Clarke's side all but eliminated but now, with a precious point in hand and heads lifted that bit higher, Scotland know a victory over Hungary on Sunday is all they need to reach a historic last-16 tie.

It may have been more had Grant Hanley's towering header creeped inside the post, but in the closing stages of a tense night in a frenzied atmosphere in Cologne, Scotland and Switzerland may have informally settled on a draw. The result surely confirms Switzerland's place in the knockout stages for the sixth major international tournament in a row, with Xherdan Shaqiri himself matching that feat following another sublime wonder-goal on the big stage. It cancelled out Scott McTominay's opener, deflected in off Fabian Schar.

Scotland certainly didn't let anyone down this time, or show the same "fear" that contributed to the woeful 5-1 defeat to Germany. Scotland rectified some issues, pushing higher, taking more chances and showing more composure in possession. Much of that came from the recalled Billy Gilmour, whose return brought an instant improvement, allowing McTominay and John McGinn to get closer to Che Adams and join attacks, giving Andy Robertson the platform to bomb forward down the left.

But it could only do so much. Despite an improved start, Switzerland gradually showed and imposed their quality, while Scotland displayed their shortcomings. Shaqiri's goal was the latest in a long line for Switzerland and the 32-year-old has now scored in every international tournament since the 2014 World Cup. Yet it was an avoidable gift from Scotland as Anthony Raltson's disastrously short back pass allowed Shaqiri the sight

of goal head coach Murat Yakin dreamed of when he brought the former Liverpool forward back into the team that beat Hungary so impressively on Saturday.

Xherdan Shaqiri curls in a sublime equaliser for the Swiss (Getty)

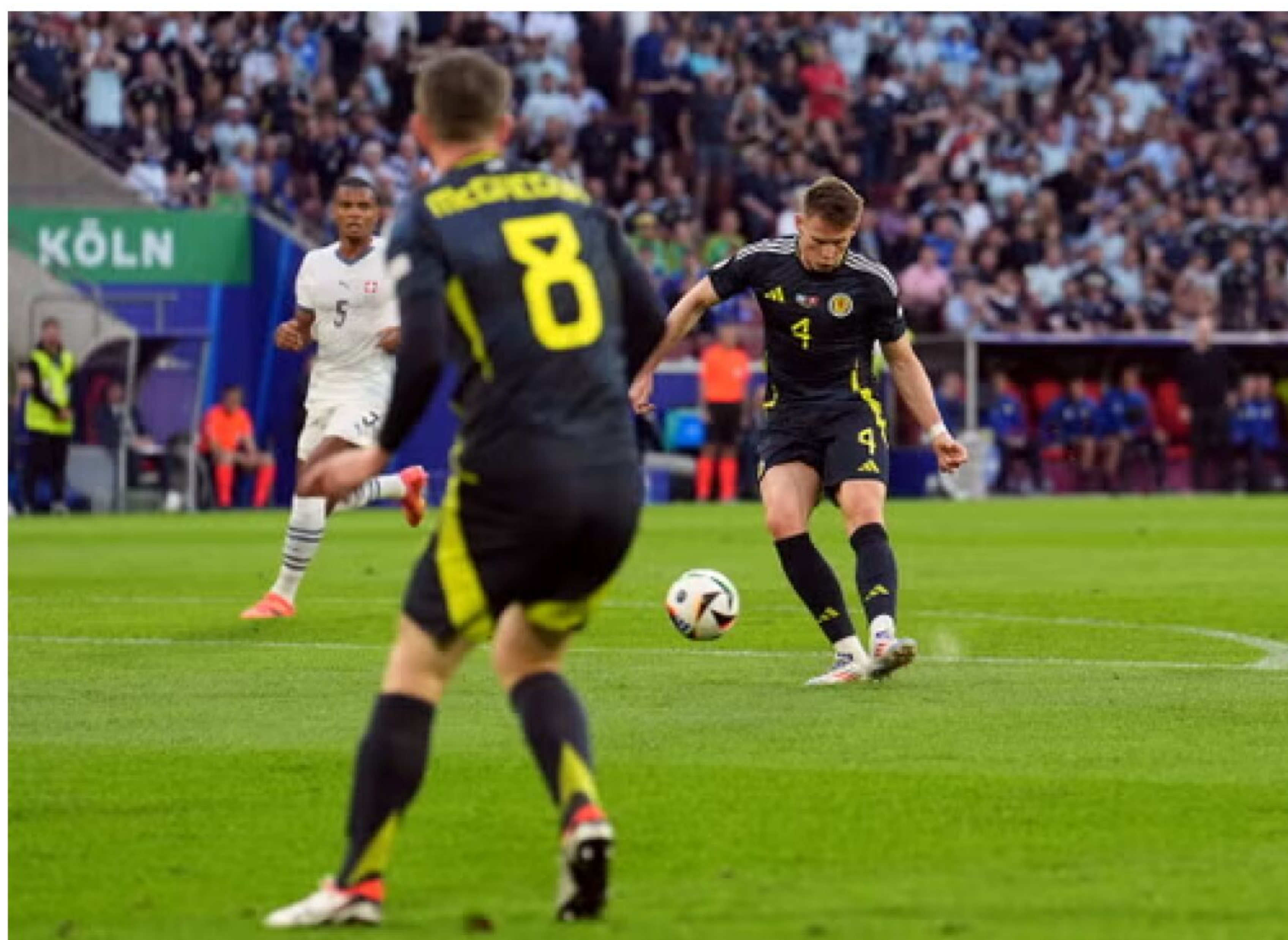
Clarke's big change was also vindicated, as his reformulated attack and midfield chased Switzerland and brought the intensity that defined the early wins of their qualifying campaign. He was satisfied. "This is the way we've been playing over the last three or four years and it is why we're here," Clarke said. "The players knew what they had to do."

"It was much more like us," Robertson agreed. "Aggressive on the front foot. We'll take the draw and we've taken it into the last game, that's all we can ask."

Having barely offered anything against Germany, Scotland's renewed intent was clear from the off, with the Tartan Army roaring in approval at the sight of two corners in the first three minutes. It set the tone of the opening exchanges. Scotland, who could hardly have performed worse, had at least arrived and gave the travelling number the least they deserved, a showing of fight and desire. In the 13th minute, it became more than that.

Gilmour was the change Scotland were crying out for, a player who could bring composure and quality of touch into midfield. The 23-year-old showed exactly why he was so desperately missed against Germany, as he brought down a clearance on his

chest and carefully played in the advancing Robertson in one swift movement.

With the wall of noise behind him, Robertson carried until the edge of the box. Both of the next two passes were imperfect – Robertson's slightly away from McGregor, McGregor's pull-back a little behind McTominay. But for Scotland, this was a beautifully imperfect goal: McTominay's shot was heading straight at Yann Sommer before Fabian Schar lifted his leg and deflected the ball into the top corner. Scotland, finally, had lift off.

Scott McTominay shoots to score Scotland's goal (PA)

McTominay continued to display an immaculate sense of timing for Scotland, reprising his role as the goalscoring midfielder who was the hero of qualifying. It was McTominay who headed Switzerland's corner away, and it was he who arrived at the other end to meet the pull-back. For Scotland, it was the perfect counterattack from a corner they themselves had needlessly conceded following Jack Hendry's wayward back pass.

That would prove to be a moment of unfortunate foreshadowing. For all of Scotland's improvements, there remained an inaccuracy to their play. Kieran Tierney, who would go off on a stretcher in the second half due to a hamstring injury, was another who conceded a corner attempting to find a route back to goalkeeper Angus Gunn. Switzerland are too experienced and

ruthless at this level to be granted such generosity so, in the 26th minute and as the ball bobbled towards him, Ralston's back pass was woefully short and let Switzerland back into the game.

Although Shaqiri certainly made the most of it. His finish was exquisite, waiting a moment to open up his body and lift a stunning curler, first time, into the top corner. It was a strike that bent and dipped magnificently, giving Gunn no chance. Shaqiri may no longer have the explosive physique to generate such an opportunity for himself, but Ralston's error provided the veteran the moment he had been selected for.

It gave Switzerland momentum as Scotland briefly retreated. After seeing two goals slip through his gloves on Friday night, Scotland became grateful for their goalkeeper. Gunn first produced a brilliant stop to deny Dan Ndoye following a counterattack, before Scotland switched off following a corner and were indebted to the offside flag as Ndoye reached Akanji's flick before he squeezed a finish into the net. In the second half, Ndoye skewed wide when suddenly through on goal, with Gunn getting the slightest of touches as the Tartan Army stood open-mouthed before erupting in sheer relief.

Scotland survived but at a cost as Tierney was stretchered off, as a depleted defence became stretched even further. But Scotland regathered. After Ndoye's miss and a belting rendition of Flower of Scotland, Clarke's side looked a threat. Hanley crashed a header against the post following a superb delivery from Robertson's free-kick. McTominay connected with a volley sweetly but it struck Manuel Akanji full on in the face. Akanji, the player of the match, was also there to clear Robertson's ball across goal, as McTominay stood ready for the tap-in.

A winner would have been priceless for Scotland, yet a Switzerland goal would have been devastating. Breel Embolo, who came on for Shaqiri to bring an entirely different danger, was slipped through and chipped Gunn but had strayed offside. Scotland breathed a sigh of relief but it would not be their last. Another Swiss chance flashed by, as Zeki Amdouini's header slipped narrowly wide, although he too may have been offside.

The Tartan Army will need a lie down after this, but Scotland are still alive and know what they have to do next.

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Hometown hero sends the hosts into knockout stage

Germany Musiala (22), Gundogan (67)	2
Hungary	0

Stuttgart-born Jamal Musiala celebrates after breaking the deadlock against Hungary (PA)

ALEX PATTLE

On the platforms at Stuttgart Hauptbahnhof, signs hung above the German fans merrily bustling their way out of the train station, into the sunshine, and to the scene of their nation's game with Hungary. "Heimstadt von Jamal Musiala", read the signs overhead: "Hometown of Jamal Musiala." Give him the keys to the city. If the 21-year-old was not a hometown hero before this Euro 2024 clash, he will be now.

If Germany needed any reminder that not every fixture would be as easy as Friday's game against Scotland, that not every occasion would be as carefree as that tournament opener, then here was that reminder. It still came in the form of victory, thankfully for the hosts, but one that presented tests and required some luck. It also required one player to step up and serve as the sinew in a Germany team that appeared disjointed at times yesterday.

And that was evident at once. Within 15 seconds, Julian Nagelsmann's players needed goalkeeper Manuel Neuer to bail them out, as the ball broke for Roland Sallai in the Germany box, and a shock opener seemed imminent. Neuer darted off his line and broadened his frame to produce a crucial stop, sparing the hosts the embarrassment endured by Italy last week, when Federico Dimarco gifted Albania a goal after 23 seconds with an errant throw-in.

Until later in the half, Germany's miscalibrations were more apparent in their attacking play. Their eagerness to produce one-touch moves left players scurrying to maintain possession at times, and their lines were almost blurred – defence, midfielder and offence veering too close to one another. When Germany adjusted and began to attack with more space between their banks, their approaches were more inventive and eye-catching, but no more effective.

As half-time approached, however, there were concerns of the defensive variety, with Germany conceding a free-kick that led Dominik Szoboszlai to draw an acrobatic save from Neuer,

moments before the Liverpool midfielder bore down on goal and lashed a half-volley. On that occasion, a late block was needed.

Musiala fires Germany's in front (Reuters)

And in the seconds before half-time, the Hungarians finally found the net, though an offside call ruled out Sallai's close-range header after Neuer had parried another headed effort.

Perhaps the ultimate proof of Germany's awkwardness came courtesy of the usually metronomic Toni Kroos, who lost his timing completely with an ill-advised half-volley along the edge of his own box, which nearly set up Szoboszlai.

Between these moments of misadventure, however, Germany did impress in spurts; of course they did. Kai Havertz demonstrated his keen sense of positioning and tricky movement, which are often his greatest strengths, and he used actual physical strength – something he does not employ enough – to create his clearest chance.

With a ball bouncing in the Hungary box, the Arsenal forward used his lanky frame to hold off Willi Orban before getting off a volley, which Peter Gulacsi only kept out with some fine reflexes. Ultimately, Havertz's end product deserted him on a few occasions, and he was hooked just before the hour mark, with Florian Wirtz – so impressive against Scotland – accompanying him off the field. On came Niclas Fullkrug and Leroy Sane.

But it was Musiala, who had performed so brilliantly against Scotland, who was the difference-maker for Germany in Stuttgart. The city's own son. Between die Nationalmannschaft's clumsier moments, Musiala broke the deadlock, finishing off a scrappy first-half sequence in Hungary's area. Ilkay Gundogan pounced on a mix-up between Gulacsi and the falling Orban, nicking possession and feeding Musiala, who sent a deflected shot skimming off the roof of the bar and in.

Orban believed he had been shoved over by Gundogan. He might have had a point, but a VAR check cleared the goal.

And in the phases around that goal, Musiala showed his quality, which would ultimately prove crucial to uniting this German side. In one moment he was bobbing and weaving his way through a cluster of Hungary defenders, nutmegging one, and in another he was racing back to prevent a counter-attack in the wake of a Germany corner, ferrying the ball to safety.

In the pink: Ilkay Gundogan doubled Germany's lead in the second half (Getty)

When Germany's attacks were faltering, it was Musiala who set about producing something positive by himself. He was always looking for the ball, always keen to drive at players, but equally happy to defend when needed. Not long before the break, the Bayern Munich playmaker even seemed to have doubled Germany's lead, and his own personal tally, forgoing backlift to send a shot searing into the top corner – just the wrong side of the netting, by the barest of margins.

In the second half, after another encouraging spell for Hungary, Musiala stepped up again. Picked out by Kroos on the edge of the visitors' box, he killed the ball with one deft touch, feigned a shimmy, then slipped a pass out to Max Mittelstadt on the left.

The waiting full-back, an adopted son of Stuttgart having impressed for VfB this season, cut the ball back for Gundogan. The captain completed the trilogy of precise strokes, placing the ball in the bottom corner.

With victory sealed in Group A, as well as a place in the last 16, Nagelsmann took off Musiala, the Heimstadt hero leaving the field to a standing ovation. And, as it turns out, not all heroes wear capes; some wear trendy, pink and purple football jerseys. But in Stuttgart, Musiala brought his very own brand of vibrancy.

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England chasing chemistry as Denmark crave revenge

Harry Kane scored the winner against Denmark in the Euro 2020 semi-final. Gareth Southgate has warned his players that today's opponents will be fired up to beat them (The FA/Getty)

MIGUEL DELANEY
CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER

Once Gareth Southgate felt his England team understood his instructions for this afternoon's match against Denmark, he then attempted to ensure they also knew what the game meant. The staff went through a session on the mindset of the opposition and "what motivations they might have". That is

something Southgate now insists on for every game, as “it’s an important part of psychologically preparing our team” for the “narrative” of any occasion, but it is more distinctive for this one. Denmark are fired up. Their squad are constantly talking about the penalty that was given for England’s 2-1 victory in the Euro 2020 semi-final at Wembley, and want to right that “injustice”.

The scorer Harry Kane is of course still there, but the player who was criticised for apparently diving isn’t. Raheem Sterling is one of three of England’s front six from that game who won’t be playing in Frankfurt, as Southgate attempts to get a new chemistry to blend. It still seemed elusive, on the evidence of the 1-0 win over Serbia. The manager said his staff “have challenged everybody to take that next step” in terms of performance in this game.

It unintentionally echoes the words of Cesc Fabregas on a player who is almost Sterling’s direct replacement in the starting XI. Phil Foden has become the focus of much of the debate after a fairly dour opening team performance. That is because he didn’t stand out in the way he has for Manchester City, where he won the Football Writers’ Player of the Year accolade last season. Fabregas said Foden needed “to take this responsibility to grow”, to “step up”.

While Southgate has received criticism for not putting the playmaker where he can excel, there is a growing feeling within the game that the player is now overly accustomed to the highly defined structure of Pep Guardiola’s City. It is almost the contradiction of a star who looks so free and fluid in his actual play. Foden has been cast as a street footballer but he is actually the ultimate product of the modern academy system, having been at City since he was a child.

Southgate knows Denmark's need is greater than England's in Frankfurt (PA)

Southgate isn't going to be able to replicate that kind of structure with England, especially not within a week, so there have been arguments that Foden may have to be sacrificed. The idea of building the attack around him has vanished in the wake of Jude Bellingham's rise, to the point that Foden felt he had to stress how they could play together.

Southgate, however, just isn't heeding those calls. Foden is virtually certain to start against Denmark, with the team expected to be much the same as against Serbia, other than perhaps Conor Gallagher coming into central midfield for Trent Alexander-Arnold due to his energy.

Southgate even went out of his way to praise the role that Foden did play.

"The first thing to say would be that I thought Phil did an exceptional job for us on Sunday. Other players grabbed the attention, but the way he worked for the team, defended the spaces, real intelligence in how he played. Towards the end of the game, he retained the ball for us in really crucial moments.

"There was a lot going on in the game, a lot tactically to solve. And we were happy with what Phil did."

Southgate even addressed some of the wider debate around Foden, and whether he is a player who needs to be "unlocked". It

was the subject of another meeting before the game. The staff wanted to help a relatively young squad deal with the level of scrutiny they get even after a win. Debates that rise like that around Foden are part of it.

“There’s going to be a narrative around a player, a couple of players, after every England game. This is a different world to the one you experience at clubs. The players as a collective recognise that now after the last couple of days. We talked with them about it. It’s very rare at their club they’d win a game and experience what they’ve experienced over the last couple of days.

Manchester City defenders John Stones and Kyle Walker during England training (Getty)

“I have to make sure I can guide them through that, let them understand it and recognise it’s the reality of our world but that we shouldn’t be thrown off track by it. We’re in a good position, we know we want to play better.”

Kyle Walker meanwhile defended his City teammate.

“I don’t think one game defines a player. It’s a season or a tournament that defines a player. Especially with Phil coming off the back of the season he had, I don’t think one 90 minutes should be scrutinised as much as I’m being told it is … Phil is a great character, he’s had...I wouldn’t say a difficult path to get here as he’s won a lot of trophies at Manchester City, but he’s had to be patient. This is just another little thing he has to

overcome when there is so much pressure on him now after such a great season, that big players have to rise up in big occasions."

It is hard to disagree. Foden and Bellingham will develop a better understanding the more they play together. The absence of Luke Shaw, however, does mean it might remain staccato for some time.

The Manchester United full-back has become one of England's most important players, as the only left-footed defender in the squad. Without him, there's an imbalance in the team that constantly requires compensating. It is a direct reason why the formation can sometimes look ill-fitting.

Southgate said that England are unlikely to see Shaw until the end of next week, which would mean the knockout stages. The left-back is still on an individual training programme, separate from the rest of the squad.

What that knockout stage looks like will be dependent on today's game in Frankfurt, of course. The 24-team nature of this tournament can mean these games are strange since they lack the same tension. One victory is almost certain to put a team through to the next round as (at least) one of the best third-placed sides. England have that victory, after their 1-0 over Serbia. Denmark don't, after a tough 1-1 draw against Slovenia.

Phil Foden was praised by his manager for his role against Serbia (PA Wire)

Their need is greater, as is their emotional edge given how that Euro 2020 semi-final went. England still want to make sure they top the group, though, which victory would all but confirm. Denmark's highly technical midfield will also offer a valuable test, especially with Christian Eriksen on his own emotional high after offering one of the stories of the tournament. Having suffered cardiac arrest in his last European Championship match, against Iceland in 2021, he then scored against Slovenia.

"It was almost written – but it is only written if you have the mentality and the desire to get back and play, and play at the level he has," Southgate said.

This is the level England's midfield has to rise to. It is why Gallagher may come in for Alexander-Arnold, as Southgate hinted in the way he spoke about the Serbia win.

"There was a moment where we weren't in as much control of the game on Sunday as we would've liked, and we felt that was a good moment for Conor Gallagher to come into the game. He did the job."

Southgate also made a point about his subs in that game.

"Within 30 seconds [Jarrod] Bowen produced a cross that, on another day, makes it 2-0 and there's a different narrative around the whole performance."

England can rectify that today. Denmark want to rectify something else.

Denmark vs England, kick-off 5pm, BBC One from 4pm

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Sports news in brief

Andy Murray retired from his second-round match against Jordan Thompson at Queen's Club yesterday (EPA)

Wimbledon doubts for Murray after back strain

Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray retired from his second-round match against Jordan Thompson at Queen's Club yesterday due to a back injury, plunging his participation at his final Wimbledon Championships into major doubt. After three games Murray, 37, took a medical timeout and he continued to play on until the change-of-ends after the fifth game, when the inevitable came and he shook hands with his Australian opponent.

This latest setback puts his next few weeks on the grass, and the finale to his illustrious career, into question. Murray was set to play an exhibition event in Hurlingham next week before Wimbledon starts on 1 July. Murray has been plagued by fitness and injury issues since injuring his back while world No 1 in 2017 and, after the match, a Murray spokesperson stated that the official reason for his retirement was a back injury.

Meanwhile, four British players have been awarded a wildcard for Wimbledon, including Emma Raducanu, Francesca Jones, Heather Watson and Yuriko Lily Miyazaki. Raducanu has not played at Wimbledon for two years, and in 2021 she reached the fourth round. Her recent career has been plagued by wrist and ankle surgeries, and she recently declined a wildcard to represent Great Britain at the summer Olympics. Other wildcards include those for Naomi Osaka, Caroline Wozniaki and Angelique Kerber, with one place yet to be announced.

Last-minute goal earns Albania draw with Croatia

Klaus Gjasula struck five minutes into stoppage time to rescue a 2-2 draw for Albania against Croatia in a thriller in Hamburg and keep alive their hopes of reaching the Euro 2024 knockout stages. The 2022 World Cup semi-finalists looked to have secured a fine comeback win after Andrej Kramaric scored in the 74th minute to cancel out Qazim Laci's early goal for Albania, then midfielder Gjasula inadvertently turned the ball past his own goalkeeper two minutes later. But with time almost up, Albania attacked down the left and the ball was crossed to Gjasula who fired left footed into the corner to stun Croatia and set up a tense finale to Group B. After both sides lost their opening matches of the tournament, only final-game victories over Spain and Italy will probably see either qualify.

Baseball legend Willie Mays dies, aged 93

Willie Mays, one of the greatest baseball players of all time, has died at the age of 93. A statement from the family issued by his

former club the San Francisco Giants yesterday said he had "passed away peacefully and among loved ones".

Mays played 23 seasons in the National League for the New York/San Francisco Giants and New York Mets, beginning in 1951. He was drafted into the US Army to serve in the Korean war, returning in 1954. That same year he won the World Series with the Giants. Mayes was known for his exuberant style of play and habit of greeting people with the phrase "Say Hey", earning him the nickname "Say Hey Kid".

Giants chair Greg Johnson said: "In the pantheon of baseball greats, Willie Mays's combination of tremendous talent, keen intellect, showmanship and boundless joy set him apart. He was an inspiration and a hero who will be forever remembered and deeply missed."

Woods handed boost after PGA Tour announces special rule

Tiger Woods has been granted a lifetime exemption to compete in the PGA Tour's eight "signature" events. The Tour has announced the honour in recognition of Woods's joint-record 82 victories on the American-based circuit. His triumphs include 15 major titles. A statement confirmed the "adjustment" to the signature events series to "introduce a sponsor exemption for lifetime achievement – 80 or more career victories – to recognise Tiger Woods in his own category".

Woods, 48, remains the biggest draw in golf despite limited appearances in recent years due to health issues. He has played in just four Tour events this year and missed the cut at both the US PGA Championship in May and US Open last week. The signature events series features eight of the Tour's most lucrative tournaments outside of the four majors and play-offs.

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